THE LIBERATION OF EUROPE

PROGRESS PUBLISHERS

THE LIBERATION OF EUROPE

Prose,
Poetry,
Journalism,
Memoirs
of World War II

"The Russian danger is therefore our danger, and the danger of the United States, just as the cause of any Russian fighting for his hearth and home is the cause of free men and free peoples in every quarter of the globe."

W. Churchill. June 22, 1941

"... the defense of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is vital to the defense of the United States."

F. Roosevelt. November 7, 1941

"... the Russians are today killing more Germans and destroying more equipment than you and I put together."

Roosevelt to Churchill. April 3, 1942

"The fact that the Soviet Union is bearing the brunt of the fighting and losses during the year 1942 is well understood by the United States and I may state that we greatly admire the magnificent resistance which your country has exhibited".

Roosevelt to Stalin, August 19, 1942

"To mark the profound admiration felt by myself and the peoples of the British Empire, I have given commands for the preparation of a Sword of Honour, which it would give me pleasure to present to the city of Stalingrad. My hope would be that this gift might commemorate in the happier times to come the inflexible courage with which the warrior city steeled itself against the powerful and persistent onslaughts of her assailants, and that it might be a token of the admiration not only of the British peoples but of the whole civilized world."

King George VI. February 21, 1943

"...the advance of their Armies from Stalingrad to the Dniester river, with vanguards reaching out towards the Pruth, a distance of 900 miles, accomplished in a single year, constitutes the greatest cause of Hitler's undoing. Since I spoke to you last not only have the Hun invaders been driven from the lands they had ravaged, but the guts of the German Army have been largely torn out by Russian valour and generalship."

W. Churchill. March 26, 1944

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PROGRESS
PUBLISHERS

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Compiled by *Mikhail Sinelnikov*

ОСВОБОЖДЕНИЕ ЕВРОПЫ

На английском языке

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PREFACE

Soldiers of Freedom...

There is good reason for choosing this poem to begin this collection. Sergei Narovchatov, the poet who composed it, was a soldier who fought in World War II. Having volunteered as a student to go to the front, he fought the German invaders on Soviet soil, and then took part in the liberation of Poland and in military action in Germany...

The liberating mission of the Soviet Armed Forces in Europe began in the last days of March, 1944, when they crossed the border between the Soviet Union and Romania. Prior to that, from June 21, 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked the USSR without any declaration of war, the Soviet people had been waging war on their own territory.

War is always a tragedy. However, the first period of the war, spent in repelling Nazi aggression, was particularly difficult for the Soviet people both because the attack had been so unexpected, and also because of military-strategic miscalculations. The enemy succeeded in seizing and destroying enormous areas of the country, reaching the very heartland of Russia—Moscow and the Volga. This was a powerful, battle-hardened enemy which had not only the armies of its satellite countries at its service, but also the economic resources of occupied France, Austria, Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia and other European states.

The diktat of force, extreme, unrestrained chauvinism and racism, and the desire to rule the world constituted the basis of the criminal policies and ideology of nazism. The rulers of Germany established in Europe a bloody *Neue Ordnung*, unleashed a second world war and inflicted on the nations of Europe misery and disaster.

The Soviet Union and its army proved to be that power which, blocking the path of the aggressor, was able to halt his advance and then drive him back. The first decisive victory by Soviet troops over the German armed forces was in December 1941, in the battle near Moscow.

Then, after heavy fighting, the occupying forces suffered defeats in the battle of Stalingrad, a city on the Volga, where over 20 German divisions were surrounded, and in the battles of Kursk and Belgorod, where the largest tank units ever seen in history opposed each other. The enemy was thrown back from Leningrad, a heroic city which had survived an unprecedented siege of 900 days. Soviet offensives in the Ukraine and Byelorussia ended in victory and the Soviet Army reached the borders of the USSR.

Soviet troops in Europe waged a war of liberation for fourteen months, right up to the final defeat of Germany. Battles were waged on the territory of ten different states. Poland and Czechoslovakia were liberated, Nazi troops were expelled from Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria withdrawn from the war. The National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia was given strong military support. Soviet soldiers fought in Austria, took part in the liberation of Norway and Denmark. Finally came the Berlin operation, followed by the final defeat of Hitler's army and the liberation of the German people from nazism.

The victorious military operations of the Soviet Army in Europe exerted a powerful influence on the entire strategic situation during the final stage of World War II. They assisted the military operations of the USSR's Allies in this war—the Anglo-American forces advancing through Italy and France. When, in January 1945, the Anglo-American forces found themselves in a difficult position as a result of the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes, the Soviet Union responded to an appeal from the government of Britain and the USA by starting its offensive in Poland ahead of the scheduled date. One common goal united the military operations of the troops of the USSR, Britain, the USA, national armies, divisions and units created in the countries liberated from nazism, all the fighting forces of the Resistance operating in the East and the West of Europe.

The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, with the complete and unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. Three months later, in accord with the commitment assumed at the Tripartite Yalta Conference of 1945, the USSR joined the war against militaristic Japan, liberating part of China and Korea. On September 3, 1945, Japan capitulated. World War II had come to an end...

During a period of fourteen months Soviet troops fought in Europe in battles which cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers. Fourteen months during which they carried through their liberating mission. Yet can this period of military operations by the Soviet Army be separated from all that had gone before, from the struggle by the Soviet people to defend their country and their freedom?

The war against Nazi Germany has been given a special name by the Soviet people: the Great Patriotic War. This name arose spontaneously in people's minds immediately after Hitler's attack, recalling the invasion by Napoleon in 1812. The war against Napoleon is also called the Patriotic War.

From the very beginning, however, it was clear that the battles being fought on the plains and in the forests of Russia to defend national freedom would also determine the fate of the countries and nations of Europe and Asia. The liberation of the countries of Europe began, matured and was prepared for here, on Soviet soil. Whatever the situation on the Soviet-German front, whatever the difficulties which Soviet people had to live through, the final goal always remained the total defeat of Nazism and the re-establishment of justice and humanity everywhere where they had been trampled upon. The very first extraordinary government documents issued following the Nazi invasion spoke of the unprecedented danger facing the country and called on the citizens of the USSR to resist the invaders. These same documents also emphasised that the war being waged by the Soviet people was, at the same time, a war to assist all the nations of Europe, a part of a single, worldwide front defending freedom and resisting enslavement.

Soldiers of freedom... This eloquent, poetic phrase was born of experience at the front, was an expression of the feelings and thoughts of the poet and soldier Sergei Narovchatov, a natural combination of the sentiments of patriotism and internationalism. These sentiments of patriotism and internationalism are natural to all Soviet literature.

The collection *The Liberation of Europe* introduces works of prose, poetry and journalism which directly reflect the final period of the war. They reconstruct precise pictures of the Soviet citizen during the war, including the sufferings and horrors, the hardships and contradictions of life at the front. Having crossed the borders of the USSR to continue their fight on foreign soil, Soviet officers and men now realised that the long-awaited victory was in their grasp, and this gave particular poignancy to their reflections on the value of life, on their family and friends waiting for them at

home, on the people to whom Soviet troops were bringing liberation and salvation.

The theme of solidarity in the war against fascism occupies a special place in the collection, which speaks about Soviet people, about those who took part in the Resistance in Europe, about Polish, Czechoslovak and Yugoslav fighters and the military operations carried out together with Soviet troops, and also about the contribution to the common Victory made by the Anglo-American armed forces, the French Liberation forces and all the patriotic and anti-Axis forces of Europe.

Any collection presupposes a selection which limits the material included. An extract cannot provide an adequate impression of a complex novel, and a poem published in abridged form inevitably loses its integrity. This is also true of memoirs and journalism. Nonetheless we hope that the reader will be able to feel the character of the works included in the collection, appreciate their content and the individual literary style of their authors.

The theme of the Great Patriotic War unites within Soviet literature writers of different generations and diverse literary experience. The works of a number of authors were published during the war itself—reports and articles sent immediately for publication in the press, and also poetry and prose. Other works were written in the postwar period, and even ten or twenty years after the war. Some of the writers were already well known to their readers before the war. Others, who served during the war as army correspondents, became known through their articles, while yet others simply stored up their impressions of the war with little idea that they would one day become writers.

Here are a few lines from their biographies.

... Konstantin Simonov was twenty-six years of age in 1941, but was already a well-known writer. An energetic and courageous war correspondent, Simonov visited many battle areas, from Stalingrad to the Polar circle, wrote about the liberation of Poland and about Yugoslav partisans, and published in newspapers, journals and books not only essays but also verse, stories, plays. After the war he made a major contribution to literature with his novels and recollections about the war.

... At the beginning of the war, Ilya Ehrenburg was a world-renowned writer. His novel *The Fall of Paris* conveyed the feelings of Soviet people in the face of the tragedy experienced by France. At the age of fifty he went to the front as a correspondent, and his vivid, striking articles were very popular with readers at home and abroad: more

than a thousand appeared in newspapers around the world during the course of the war.

... Oles Gonchar served as a mortar man and fought in his native Ukraine. *The Standard Bearers*, his trilogy about the liberation of Europe, was published in 1946 and was the first major prose work on the war. The titles of the three parts of the trilogy reveal the author's own route through the war: "The Alps", "The Blue Danube", "Golden Prague".

... Emanuil Kazakevich began his literary activity before the war. At the front he first served as a journalist and then joined the fighting forces and rose to the rank of head of army intelligence. After the war Kazakevich was for a while the commandant of a German provincial town. All of these events in his life are described in his books.

... Vassily Subbotin was an officer on the western border when the Germans invaded. He experienced the bitterness of retreat to the East, and then the victorious advance West. He took part in the storming of Berlin as correspondent on a divisional newspaper. Twenty years later he published a book entitled *How Wars End*, a unique chronicle, extracts from which are included in this collection.

... Yuri Bondarev was the youthful commander of an artillery crew. He first appeared in print fifteen years after the war, and succeeded in combining in his works the vivid directness of his wartime experiences with philosophical reflection and acute ethical perception.

... Vasil Bykov, a lieutenant during the war, has since become the author of a cycle of stories about dramatic wartime situations at the front which reveal the human spirit at its best and noblest. Bykov himself is from Byelorussia, a region which displayed great heroism in the face of enormous sufferings, and which lost one in four of its inhabitants. His books have become a major phenomenon in literature on the war.

However different the literary biographies of the authors, all base their work upon their own personal experiences. On comparing the dates and circumstances in which these works were written, it is impossible not to notice how, with the passage of time, the philosophical interpretation of events becomes increasingly marked, with greater emphasis on the lessons which mankind must draw from the tragic experience of World War II.

For the most part, the material included in this collection has been arranged according to the chronology of military events, thus conveying the dynamism reflected in the written word. The chronology of the events, as also their geography are, as a rule, easily identifiable not only in essays or verse

closely related in style to reports, but also in the short stories and extracts from tales and novels.

The collection also includes extracts from the memoirs of Soviet military leaders such as Georgi Zhukov, Ivan Konev and Vladimir Tributs. These memoirs, while revealing the scale of military operations in 1944-1945 also reflect close attention to the everyday life of the fighting soldier, and to the soldier himself, the image of the warrior. The memoirs of Georgi Zhukov open with the eloquent words: "To the Soviet soldier". The soldier, the Soviet citizen under arms, defender and liberator—here is the image which lies at the core of Soviet literature on the Great Patriotic War.

In 1995 an unusual memorial will be unveiled to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Victory over fascism. It will stand in Smolensk, an old Russian city which in 1941 offered heroic resistance to the enemy. What is unusual about this memorial is that it is not to an actual historical figure, but to a character from literature, the soldier Vassili Tyorkin, hero of the epic poem *Vassili Tyorkin* by the well known writer Alexander Tvardovsky, a native of Smolensk who himself fought in the war. The image of Tyorkin, a bold, intelligent soldier full of love of life, became a household figure, bringing together the best features of the victorious nation, and it is symbolic that the memorial is being built with money raised by voluntary donations (an extract from the poem is included in the collection.)

The value of any literary work depends above all on the moral criteria it expresses, on what it brings to enrich the human mind and heart. In this sense, Soviet literature reconstructing the events of World War II occupies a special place in Soviet belles lettres. Books about the war, about the battle against nazism, about the victory of civilisation over barbarism, are books which are essentially against war, books written in defence of men and humanity. They warn against the dangers of new military madness. In this lies their perennial significance.

Mikhail Sinelnikov

SERGEI NAROVCHATOV

Soldiers of Freedom

Our red flag flutters proud in foreign winds
Above the medieval council-building.
The city's ours, and we've been resting since
Headquarters' orders put an end to killing.

The townsfolk, though—you couldn't see a soul.
The emptiness fell on us like a shock.
But suddenly from round a ruined wall
Came fluttering a faded female frock.

Beneath a kerchief worn since years ago
Her fragile shoulders quivered in the cold.
With feet unshod, across the wet March snow
A girl ran up to me, her hair like gold.

I hadn't time to understand a thing
When, filling me with bitterness and pity,
She flung her arms around me, worn and thin,
Mute, weeping, in the centre of the city.

What pain showed in those eyes, what sleepless depth,
With what remembrances that tortured heart was laden!...
So this was whom we'd saved from certain death,
To whom my mates and I had given freedom!

To far, sad lands her homeward journey lies
By freedom's road, which she is still unsure of.
What is your name, my lass with woeful eyes?
Europe!

March 1945

© Sergei Narovchatov, "Soldiers of Freedom" in *Let the Living Remember. Soviet War Poetry*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, pp. 183-185.

Sergei Narovchatov (1919-1981)—Soviet poet, essayist, literary critic, State Prize winner. He is the author of the poetic anthologies *The Bonfire* (1948), *Midday* (1969), *Wartime Youth* (1975), the poem *Vassili Buslayev* (1967), and also the novels *The Lyricism of Lermontov* (1964), *Unusual Literary Studies* (1970) and others.

In 1941 Narovchatov volunteered for the front, fought for the liberation of Poland and in battles waged on German soil. Narovchatov's wartime biography can be traced quite clearly in his writings, both those which were born on the battlefield, under fire, and those written later. They are marked by compassion for all those under the oppression of fascism.

ILYA EHRENBURG

The Fate of Europe

Not long ago I happened to be in Gzhatsk district, liberated from the Germans. The word "desert" barely conveys the picture of cataclysm, of extreme catastrophe, which hits you in the eye as soon as you get to places where the Germans have been throwing their weight around for seventeen months. Gzhatsk district had been merry and rich. From there the milk of a pampered breed of cows had gone to Moscow. From there skillful tailors and dressmakers had gone to the capital. One quaint aspect of our country is how the old was interlaced with the new. Spacious buildings permeated with light—the school, community centre and hospital—towered next to the ancient Kazan Cathedral and the tiny wooden houses of Gzhatsk. The town had both tiny narrow streets with impassable mud and teenagers dreaming of flying into the stratosphere. Now it is replaced by a misshapen heap of iron bars, charred stone and ballast. Gzhatsk is marked on the map and in our hearts, but it no longer exists on the earth. Using the latest achievements in technology the vandals of our age had been destroying the town. They blew up nurseries and churches with tolite, and bursting into houses they knocked the glass out of the windows, pouring fuel on the walls and rejoicing in the "Bengal light". Gzhatsk was on fire. Half of the villages in the district were burnt down. The only ones to remain intact were those the Germans hastily abandoned under the Red Army onslaught. There were few people left either. The Germans have driven six thousand Russians away from Gzhatsk to Germany. One has visions of dark antiquity, of the beginnings of human history. In vain did mothers try to hide their children from the German slave-traders. They hid little boys in snow—and they froze. They would cover little girls with hay—but the Germans ran through the hayricks with their bayonets. Boys of twelve or thirteen walked along

Ilya Ehrenburg (1891-1967)—Soviet prose writer, poet, journalist, public figure, International Lenin Prize and State Prizes winner (1952). He has been the Vice-President of the World Peace Council since 1950.

Ehrenburg is the author of anthologies of verse, the novels *Julio Jurenito* (1922), *The Fall of Paris* (1941), *The Storm* (1946-1947), *The Ninth Wave* (1952), the story *The Thaw* (1954-1956), memoirs entitled *People, Years, Life* (1961-1965), a collection of stories, articles on literary criticism, journalistic writings, etc.

During World War II Ehrenburg worked as a correspondent for the national press, and also for the press of the Allied countries. It has been calculated that during this period he wrote over a thousand articles, sketches and notes (collected together in the three-volume work *The War* 1942-1944). Ehrenburg's journalistic work is distinguished not only by its range of factual material, but also by its broad historical and political framework.

the streets of the town, driven by rifle-butts; the Germans were herding children into slavery. At times they took whole families, whole villages. The district emptied. Famine, typhus, diphtheria and the Gestapo torture-chambers did their business. But perhaps the moral repression of human dignity was no less terrible than the physical extermination. When you arrive in a town that has been liberated from the Germans, it is not just the ruins and corpses that scare you, but the eyes of the human beings, their fire gone. People talk in a whisper, shivering at the sound of steps, shying away from darkness. I saw this in Gzhatsk in March. I had also seen it in Kursk in February. At the beginning of the war the newspapers talked about what fascism brings to the world. Now we can see what fascism had brought to the areas seized by the Germans. The word "death" has entered life too much, it's out of place here, it's better to say nothingness, chasm; an old peasant woman was right when she mournfully described the Germans as "worse than death".

When you look westwards you can see dreadful pictures, somewhere far away there is another Kursk and another Gzhatsk. They begin by having familiar names—Minsk or Chernigov. Then the names change. These charred remains were the French town of Arras. These victims of execution were brought from the Czech town of Tabor. The far western region of Brittany, the cape of Europe turned towards the New World, was named "Finistère" by the French—"the end of the earth". From Gzhatsk to Brest, to Finistère, the same night, the same desolation, the same pictures of mockery, killing and barbarism. "The end of the earth" became the end of a great European night.

We have a passionate love for our land, our sources, our history. We are proud of our Slav Hellas—Kievan Rus, the harmony of the Cathedral of Saint Sophia[1], the lament of Yaroslavna[2], the classical clarity of Andrei Rublyov[3], the civil liberties of Novgorod and the martial deeds of Alexander Nevsky[4] and Dmitry Donskoy[5]. But never have we separated our culture from European culture; we are linked not by wires, not by rails, but by our veins and brains. We have been both the diligent pupils and the teachers of Europe. Only the ignorant can think of Russia as a child, admitted to the school of culture two hundred years ago. The testaments of Ancient Greece, the cradle of European consciousness, came to us not through the conquerors and law-makers of Rome but through the philosophers and devotees of Byzantium. Suffice to compare the paintings of Andrei Rublyov with the frescos of the early Renaissance masters—Cimabue or Giotto, to see how much closer Russian art is

to the spirit of Hellas, to its clarity and gaiety. When Russia startled the world with her heights of thought and word, it was not birth but maturity. Who can say what excited Pushkin most—the poetry of Byron or the tales of his nurse Arina? The foremost nineteenth-century minds of Russia shared the passions of Europe, her hopes and sorrow. They introduced Russian passion, truthfulness and humanity into European consciousness. The gifts of the West, the legacy of humanism and the French Revolution, are not all that can be seen in Belinsky's[6] fervour, Chernyshevsky's[7] selfless devotion to his cause, and the heroism of the Russian revolutionaries. One can also perceive in them a search for the truth, which was the historic course of Russian culture. This is why Tolstoy[8], Dostoyevsky[9] and Chekhov[10], Tchaikovsky and Mussorgsky[11] had enriched every cultured European, deepened and extended the very concept of Europe. This is why Lenin remains the model of state genius of Russia, and the summit of universal and European thought.

We understand France's sorrow not just because we have Gzhatsk, Kharkov and Minsk, but also because the fate of European culture is infinitely dear to us. We remember that the Decembrists[12] were inspired by the Declaration of the Rights of Man, that Turgenev[13] was a friend of the best writers of France. We do not view the tragedy of Europe from the sidelines.

For a thousand days the Germans have been trampling the countries of Europe they have conquered. I repeat: a thousand days. A continent that not long before had been flourishing and diverse has become terrifying. Death is monotonous. It is enough to see Voronezh, Vyazma and Istra to imagine a great number of European towns. The Germans or their proteges cannot restore what has been destroyed: all their forces are directed to further destruction. Thus to this day the Spanish town of Guernica is a heap of ash, the streets of Almeria are debris. In five years General Franco failed to build up Madrid or Barcelona. The Spanish have not been able to work on their houses, they have been forced to serve the German quartermaster service and die for Berlin near Leningrad. The ruins of Rotterdam are twin-like in their similarity to the ruins of Belgrade. The north of France, which used to remind one of a stone anthill, the streets of one town turning into the streets of the next, has become a stone desert. The towns of the Atlantic coast have disintegrated and been burnt down.

What has become of the people? One woman in Gzhatsk, whose four children were driven away by the Germans and

whose house was then burnt down, said to me: "A house, that will come in time, but without your children you cannot live..." The Germans have not just encroached upon the ancient stones of Europe, they have crushed her body, her youth, her children. People have been deprived of the most simple of rights, that of living on their land. The underground French newspaper *Voix du Nord* reports that professors from Kiev University and girl students from Kharkov and Minsk are doing hard labour in Lille and Valenciennes. French engineers and workers brought from Paris by the Germans languish in munitions factories in the Ukrainian town of Zaporozhye. Hitler deals in slaves. He has sent Poles to the timber works of Finland, and Slovenes to excavations in Poland. People from Alsace have been despatched to the Ukraine to build roads for the Germans. Expert Belgian lace-makers dig the land in Lithuania. Able-bodied people are rounded up by the Germans on the streets of French towns and herded off to the East. Each day tens of thousands of slaves are taken from France. The weeping of the mothers of Gzhatsk seems to echo in Lyon, but it is not an echo, it is the mothers of Lyon weeping.

"We can only compare our time with the years of plague and high mortality of the middle ages," writes the *Journal de Genève*. A French king once said, "Je veux qu'il n'y ait si pauvre paysan en mon royaume qu'il n'ait tous les dimanches sa poule au pot." (I wish that every one of the poor peasants in my kingdom might every Sunday have a hen in the pot.") There were 37,000 hens in Gzhatsk district before the Germans came. One hundred and ten are left... Not long ago I read a detailed article in a German economics periodical on the disappearance of eggs in Europe. Some "Herr Doctor" was looking at the place held by eggs in international trade, coming to the melancholy conclusion: "It is essential that Denmark, France and the protectorate find new products to export." The "products to export" were found—slaves. But it is worth noting that in discussing the reasons for the disappearance of eggs in Europe, there was one the German "scholar" did not mention—the hen-eating soldiers.

The French have already eaten all the supplies of turnips grown for fodder, they have eaten the crows and sparrows. In the south they eat grass, calling it "Laval's lettuce", in the north they eat acorns and ground-up bark. In Greece people who have lost their senses through hunger gnaw at bushes. Ghosts drag themselves along the streets of Athens—educated people and workers, artists and craftsmen. They are not taken on for work: they do not have the strength to lift a spade. They beg for alms, and the German soldiers kick out

at them like dogs. And there are no dogs left: they have been eaten.

Terrible illnesses mow down those left out by the slave-owners. Like plague-carrying rats the Germans have brought infection with them. In Holland, once replete and rosy-cheeked, the country of van Houten's cocoa, the increase in tuberculosis has taken on menacing proportions. In the Hague alone 17,000 cases of acute tuberculosis were noted in the first nine months of 1942. In France, according to statistics in the Nazi-controlled newspaper *Sept jours*, there are one million people ill with an acute form of tuberculosis. The number of people with syphilis has increased twelve times over, the number of people with skin diseases has increased thirty times over. There is no soap, no medicine, no bread. A third of the population of Greece has died from hunger and epidemics. Diphtheria has spread through Poland and Czechoslovakia, there are no vaccinations, and infant mortality is reaching 60 per cent.

Even more terrible is life for those Europeans who have been uprooted by the Germans. Half a million French slaves have already died in Germany, two million await death. "We live in a horrible barracks amid excrement and lice. We are fed on broth made from potato peel. They hit us on the back with sticks," tells a French person who escaped from Germany (*Le Document*, March 1943). Not long ago a German newspaper (*Danziger Vorposten*) reported that two Serbs were sentenced to prison for "a barbaric act": they had eaten a kitten belonging to a woman inhabitant of Danzig.

Europe was filled with homeless children. A correspondent on *National Zeitung* writes that in France he met "crowds of children gone wild, who run away shouting if a person approaches them". At the Salpietier Hospital in Paris there are 286 girls between the ages of nine and fourteen, ill with syphilis. Two boys, one eight, the other eleven, were arrested in Marseilles, accused of a number of murders. In Serbia homeless children wander in groups of 20 to 30. In Greece cases of cannibalism have been recorded among the children.

Isn't it clear that culture has broken down? Schools and universities are either closed or turned into breeding-grounds for Nazi ignorance. The newspaper *Marseilleuse* describes a lecture given by a "professor" of the College de France: "He spent a long while explaining that a vaguely drawn chin and unchiselled facial shape are evidence of racial impurity." This takes place in the very same auditoria as lectures were given by the mathematician Poincaré, the chemist Perrin,

the physicist Langevin. The newspaper *Dépêche de Toulouse* notes with sadness: "Unprecedented grammatical ignorance has been noted among the young people passing final year examinations." The stock of books held in Czech libraries was reduced by 70 per cent by Nazi "purges". I managed to see some books published in France during the Nazi occupation. I won't begin to talk about the ideas in them: even books on philosophy are full of the cattle-breeding spirit obligatory in "Neo-Europe". No, there's something else that concerns me: these books were written by barbarians. In France every schoolchild knew how to express his or her idea. Now in France even "writers" don't know how to say what they mean. A thousand days is not a short time. In a thousand days you can learn a lot and forget a lot.

The system of taking hostages, the sight of executions and torture transform the hearts of the weak. Children see gallows. Teenagers are told: "If you give away your father, you will get a tin of food and a bottle of wine. If you hide your father, we will take you to the Gestapo, and there they know how to drive pins under your finger-nails." Terror transforms people. Some become cowardly. Some become pathologically cruel. Norms of behavior disappear. The fundamentals of any communal life are shaken. Europe has become open to infection, to a collapse of her inner organs, to anarchy.

Europe does not want to die. Bleeding, the guerrillas of France and Yugoslavia are fighting. There are still many undefeated cells. Red blood corpuscles fight the leukaemia. The legacy of centuries, Europe's fine past, resists the brown plague. It is possible to save Europe. But time is getting short. It is naive to think that peoples who have endured one thousand days will endure another thousand. This spring the stern word "time!" rises before the defenders of life and culture, before all the peoples at war against Nazi death.

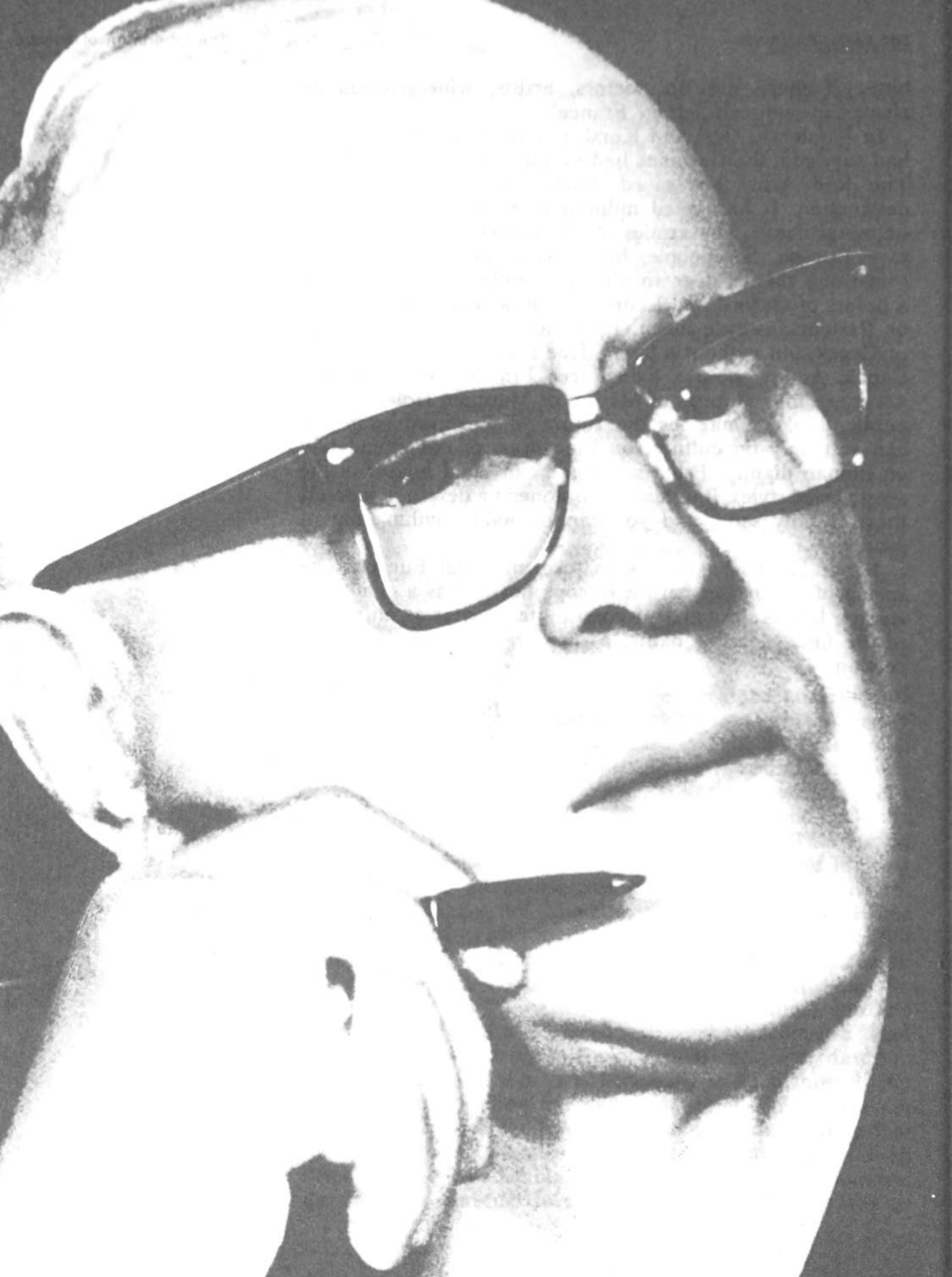
No one doubts the ultimate victory of the anti-Hitler coalition. Stalingrad was the splendid beginning. The Red Army and the country supporting it showed inner strength and resoluteness. We know that together with our Allies we will inflict a final blow to Hitler's war machine. But the sleeping beauty must be freed before she becomes a dead beauty—I am referring to Europe, held captive by fascism. It's not enough to win. It is necessary to keep those living forces which will allow the wine-growers of Burgundy again to plant their vines, the fishermen of Norway again to spread their nets, the stone-masons of Europe again to build up the towns, and the scholars to bring to the new generation the semi-extinguished torch of knowledge. Victory will be

bitter if there are no doctors, artists, wine-growers or electrical engineers left in France!

In Smolensk, Orel and Kursk regions I saw villages that had survived: the Germans had no time to burn them down. The Red Army has saved much that is precious from destruction. It has saved millions of people from physical or moral death. The armies of the anti-Hitler coalition can save Europe, her people, her culture, her soul. There is something that is dear to all the enemies of fascism. The scholars of Oxford and Leningrad know what La Sorbonne or Pasteur Institute mean. In London they love the plays of Čapek, but without a living, free Prague there can be no Čapek. And without a living, free France Americans will never see the paintings of Matisse or Marquet. However any public thinker imagines the future of European states, it can rest only on culture, on the norms of communal life, on human dignity. From stone one can build houses in the most varied styles. But there is no stone in a desert, in a desert there is only sand, and you cannot build anything out of sand.

Never before has spring so tormented old Europe. The spring of 1943 rises before Europe not just as a change in season, but as the burst of cosmic life. It rises as an appeal to the final, decisive battle, as the beginning of the resurrection.

19 March 1943



GEORGI ZHUKOV

Reminiscences and Reflections

(An Excerpt)

The Byelorussian operation was to cover a vast area along a front stretching for more than 1,200 km from Lake Neshcherdo to the Pripyat, and 600 km deep—from the Dnieper to the Vistula and the Narew. In fierce battle, our troops would have to engage 200,000 enemy soldiers and officers armed with 9,500 artillery pieces and mortars, 900 tanks and assault guns and 1,350 combat aircraft. The prearranged defences, 250-270 kilometres deep, also had to be overcome.

The Soviet offensive in Byelorussia coincided with the third anniversary of the war. The three war years had seen events of historic importance. The USSR had beaten the Nazi troops in several major battles and was completing the liberation of its territory. On the eve of the new clash against the enemy, our men were confident of defeating the Army Group Centre.

They were undoubtedly encouraged by the fact that on June 6, 1944, our Allies[1] had landed in Normandy and opened a second front in Europe. Although the fate of Nazi Germany had been virtually sealed, Soviet soldiers enthusiastically welcomed the second front, which brought the downfall of fascism and the end of the war closer.

The general offensive was initiated on June 23 by the 1st Baltic Front (commander Colonel-General Bagramyan, member of the Military Council General Leonov, Chief of Staff General Kurasov); the Third Byelorussian Front under Colonel-General Chernyakhovsky (member of the Military Council General Makarov, Chief of Staff General Pokrovsky); and the Second Byelorussian Front under Colonel-General Zakharov. The First Byelorussian Front under

Georgi Zhukov (1896-1974)—Marshal of the Soviet Union. During World War II he was in command of a number of vital sectors of the Soviet-German front. He displayed his abilities in organising the defence of Leningrad, and the defeat of the enemy in the Battle of Moscow. He was responsible for co-ordinating troop operations in the Battle of Stalingrad, in the battles at Kursk, on the Dnieper and in Byelorussia. He also played a major role in the liberation of Poland and Germany. On 8 May, 1945, in Karlshorst (Berlin), he accepted the surrender of Nazi Germany on behalf of the Soviet Supreme Command.

Zhukov's memoirs, *Reminiscences and Reflections* (1st edition, 1969) depict the war not only in its concrete details, but also in terms of strategy and overall pattern. The extract printed below describes the planning and conduct of a number of major military operations which enabled the Soviet Army to cross the borders of the USSR and prepared the way for the liberation of Europe.

© Marshal of the Soviet Union G. Zhukov, *Reminiscences and Reflections*, Vol. 2, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1985, pp. 274-296.

General of the Army Rokossovsky joined the offensive on the following day.

Behind enemy lines, partisan detachments, units and formations began active operations, coordinating them, as previously arranged, with the actions of the Fronts. Front headquarters had special departments for the guidance of the partisan movement;[2] these were responsible for communications, provision of materiel and supplies and coordination with the partisan detachments. Partisan units and detachments were very active in the Byelorussian operation. This was facilitated by the wooded terrain. More Soviet officers and men had been left behind there when our troops retreated in 1941 than anywhere else.

The initial days of the Byelorussian offensive saw fierce fighting on the ground and in the air on all sectors, although weather conditions somewhat restricted aviation on both sides—I soon learned from the General Staff that Vasilevsky[3] was successfully breaking through the enemy defences. That was wonderful news for all of us.

Things were also going well on the Second Byelorussian Front, where the 49th Army of General Grishin had smashed through the enemy defences on the Mogilev sector and secured a bridgehead on the River Dnieper on the march.

The 1st Byelorussian Front was pushing ahead towards Parichi according to plan. On the very first day the 1st Tank Corps of General Panov entered the gap and deepened it by 20 kilometres towards Bobruisk; this made it possible to bring General Pliev's mechanised cavalry group into action on the following day.

On June 25, Pliev's group and Panov's corps knocked out the rear guard units of the retreating enemy and began to advance rapidly. The 28th and 65th armies were also advancing steadily. The armoured and artillery units moving towards Parichi ploughed up the wooded and boggy terrain so thoroughly that even tractors could hardly get across.

Inspired by the successful breakthrough, the engineer units and men of all arms did all they could to quickly build a corduroy road which greatly facilitated logistic support...

I was not able to see the liquidation of the enemy in Bobruisk, but witnessed the rout of the Germans south-east of the city. Hundreds of bombers of Rudenko's 16th Air Army, coordinating missions with the 48th Army, struck blow after blow at the enemy group. Scores of lorries, cars and tanks, fuel and lubricants were burning all over the battlefield. More and more bomber echelons took their

bearings from the blazing fires, and kept dropping bombs of various weights.

The terror-stricken German soldiers scattered in every direction; those who did not surrender were killed. Thousands of Germans who had been taken in by Hitler who had promised them a victorious Blitzkrieg against the Soviet Union were dying in the fields of Byelorussia. One of our prisoners was General Lüttzow, Commander of the 35th Army Corps.

The 48th Army under Romanenko and the 105th Rifle Corps of the 65th Army had the job of finally eliminating the enemy troops in the Bobruisk area. The 3rd and 65th armies with the 9th and 1st Guards Tank corps were ordered not to halt in the Bobruisk area, but to proceed rapidly in the general direction of Osipovichi, which was liberated on June 28. On June 29 our troops totally cleared Bobruisk of the enemy.

The 28th Army of General Luchinski and the mechanised cavalry group of General Pliev were thrusting towards Slutsk.

After the enemy's defeat in the Vitebsk-Bobruisk area, the flank groupings of our troops made considerable headway, and threatened to surround the Army Group Centre.

As we observed and analysed the actions of the German troops and their High Command at that time, we were somewhat surprised by their blunders, which resulted in catastrophic consequences. Instead of quickly withdrawing to the rear lines and reinforcing their flanks, which were threatened by the Soviet striking forces, the German troops engaged in prolonged frontal battles east and north-east of Minsk.

On June 28, after consultation with Vasilevsky, myself and the Front commanders, the *Stavka* of the Supreme Command specified the further tasks of our troops.

The 1st Baltic Front was ordered to liberate Polotsk and advance towards Glubokoye. The 3rd and 2nd Byelorussian Fronts were to liberate Minsk, capital of Byelorussia. The 1st Byelorussian Front was instructed to advance with its main forces towards Slutsk and Baranovichi; part of its forces were to exploit the strike at Minsk, envelop it from the south and south-west. The tasks set by the *Stavka* stemmed from the overall objective of the operation—to surround and rout all troops of the Army Group Centre. The strength and disposition of our troops fully corresponded to that objective.

The success of the operation testified to the foresight and

the growing maturity of the Soviet commanders who had mastered the art of operations and strategy.

It is unfortunate that I was unable to communicate directly with Vasilevsky so that we could agree on further cooperation between General Gorbatov's 3rd Army and the Second and Third Byelorussian Fronts, whose object was to take Minsk and shut off the withdrawal routes of a major German force. The 2nd Byelorussian Front was pressing hard on the grouping, preventing it from breaking away—a positive factor in parallel pursuit.

The entire German 4th Army was almost completely surrounded. How would the German High Command act at that critical moment? It was a very important question for our Supreme Command, the General Staff and all of us who were conducting this important operation.

As is the rule in such conditions, the echelons of command concentrated on reconnaissance to find out the enemy's general plan and practical steps. But no matter how hard we tried to discover the main features of the operational strategy of the German Command, we found nothing beyond the reinforcement of the sectors considered most dangerous.

The Byelorussian partisans operating in the Minsk area informed us that the Government House, the building of the republican Party Central Committee and the Officers' House were being hastily mined for demolition before retreat. To save the city's biggest buildings we decided to accelerate the advance of our armoured troops and send along engineers for demining. Their task was to fight their way into the city—avoiding engagement with the enemy on the approaches—and seize the government buildings.

The action was performed successfully, and the important buildings were cleared of mines and saved.

At dawn on July 3, the 2nd Guards Tank Corps of Burdeiny burst into Minsk from the north-east; the advanced units of the 5th Guards Tank Army under Marshal Rotmistrov approached the city from the north. At mid-day the 1st Guards Tank Corps of the 1st Byelorussian Front commanded by General Panov entered the city. The 3rd Army of General Gorbatov followed Panov's Tank Corps into the Minsk area. Other Soviet troops went south-west and north-west of Minsk, throwing back to the west the reserves the enemy was bringing up.

By the end of July 3, a major group of formations of the German 4th Army was cut off from withdrawal routes and encircled east of Minsk. It included the 12th, 27th and 35th Field corps and the 39th and 41st Tank corps—more than 100,000 officers and men in all.

By the evening of July 3, all of Minsk was liberated.

The capital of Byelorussia was barely recognisable. I had commanded a regiment there for seven years and knew well every street, and all the main buildings, bridges, parks, stadiums and theatres. Now everything was in ruins; where whole apartment buildings had stood, there was nothing but heaps of rubble.

The people of Minsk were a pitiful sight, exhausted and haggard, many of them in tears...

By July 11, the surrounded German troops, in spite of their resistance, were killed or taken prisoner. Among the 35,000 prisoners were 12 generals, including three corps commanders and nine division commanders. Our men spent several days more tracking down groups of German officers and men trying to join their troops, but the enemy was rolling back so rapidly that this was not easy. The local population and the partisans, the real masters of the Byelorussian forests, helped us immensely in clearing the territory of the enemy...

On July 7, when our troops were completing the elimination of the encircled enemy grouping east and south-east of Minsk, and the advance echelons of the 1st and 3rd Byelorussian and the 1st Baltic Fronts had advanced far west of the Minsk meridian and were fighting in the area of Vilnius, Baranovichi and Pinsk, Stalin telephoned to summon me to the GHQ.

Early in the morning of July 8, I was still in the Baranovichi area. The troops of the 65th and 48th armies were already engaged in fighting for the city, and several hours later it was liberated. On that day I flew to Moscow, put myself in order, and went to the General Staff.

Before meeting the Supreme Commander I wanted to study the latest developments in greater detail.

Antonov,[4] precise as usual, analysed the situation and informed me of the General Staff's opinion of probable developments in the immediate future. As I listened to Antonov I was pleased to note that the General Staff and its leadership had greatly improved their strategic and operational skills.

At about 13:00 Stalin called Antonov and asked about me. After a few more questions he told Antonov and me to report at his summer house. We arrived at 14:00 sharp. Stalin was in good humour and joked.

During our talk Vasilevsky called over the radiotelephone and reported on the latest developments on the First Baltic and Third Byelorussian Fronts. The news must have been good, for Stalin's gaiety increased.

"I haven't had breakfast yet," he said, "let's go to the dining room and talk."

Although Antonov and I had had breakfast, we did not decline the invitation.

During breakfast we talked about Germany's capacity to wage war on two Fronts, against the Soviet Union and the Allied expeditionary forces which had landed in Normandy, and about the role and tasks of the Soviet troops at this concluding phase of the war.

From the precise manner in which Stalin expressed his ideas it was obvious that he had thought out all these matters very carefully. Although he believed that we were strong enough to finish off Nazi Germany single-handed, Stalin sincerely welcomed the opening of the Second Front in Europe, which brought closer the end of the war, so much desired by the Soviet people who were extremely exhausted by the war and privations.

No one had any doubt that Germany had definitely lost the war. This was settled on the Soviet-German front in 1943 and the beginning of 1944. The discussion now centred on how soon and with what political and military results the war would end.

Molotov[5] and other members of the State Committee for Defence joined us.

In discussing Germany's ability to continue the armed struggle, we all agreed that her main problem would be the exhaustion of her manpower and resources at a time when the Soviet Union would receive reinforcements from partisan units and the people who had remained in occupied territory, now that the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Lithuania and other areas had been liberated. Besides, the opening of the Second Front compelled Germany to strengthen her forces in the west.

The question was what Hitler's military leaders could hope for in the given situation.

Stalin's answer was: "They are like a gambler betting his last coin. All their hopes were pinned on the British and Americans. In deciding to wage war against the Soviet Union, Hitler took into account the imperialist circles in Britain and the USA, who totally shared his thinking. And not without reason: they did everything they could to direct the military actions of the Wehrmacht against the Soviet Union."

Molotov added that Hitler would probably attempt at any cost to make a separate agreement with the US and British government circles.

"That is true," said Stalin, "but Roosevelt and Churchill

will not agree to a deal with Hitler. They will try to attain their political aims in Germany by setting up an obedient government, not through collusion with the Nazis, who have lost all the trust of the people."

Then Stalin asked me: "Can our troops begin liberating Poland, reach the Vistula without a stop, and in what sector can we commit the 1st Polish Army which has now become an effective fighting force?"

"Not only can our troops reach the Vistula," I replied, "but they have to secure good bridgeheads beyond it which are essential for further offensive operations in the strategic direction of Berlin. As for the 1st Polish Army, it should be directed towards Warsaw."

Antonov completely agreed with me. He also reported to the Supreme Commander that the German Command had brought up a large group of troops, including armoured formations, to plug the gap which had been formed as a result of the actions of our western Fronts. As a result, the enemy's strength in the sector of the 1st Ukrainian Front was considerably weakened.

Antonov went on to report on the concentration of materiel and replacements on the First Ukrainian Front and the left flank of the First Byelorussian Front, which were getting ready to assume the offensive in accordance with the previously adopted plan.

"You will now have to undertake the coordination of the 1st Ukrainian Front," Stalin told me. "Give special attention to the left flank of the First Byelorussian Front and the First Ukrainian Front. You know the general plan and the tasks of the 1st Ukrainian Front. No changes have been made in the Supreme Command's plan, and you can acquaint yourself with the details at the General Staff."

Next we discussed the capacities of the troops coordinated by Vasilevsky.

I told the Supreme Commander it was advisable to considerably strengthen Vasilevsky's group of fronts and the Second Byelorussian Front, and ask Vasilevsky to cut off the German Army Group North and occupy East Prussia.

"Are you in cahoots with Vasilevsky?" asked Stalin, "because he also asks for his Fronts to be reinforced."

"We are not," I replied, "but if that is his opinion, he is correct."

"The Germans will fight for East Prussia till the very end," Stalin said, "and we may get stuck there. We should first of all liberate the Lvov Region and the eastern part of Poland. Tomorrow you will meet Bierut, Osóbka-Morawski and Rola-Zymierski at my place. They represent the Polish

National Liberation Committee and they intend to issue a manifesto to the Polish people after the 20th of this month. We will send Bulganin[6] as our representative to the Poles, and leave Telegin as Member of the Military Council at Rokossovsky's[7] headquarters."

That evening I was invited to Stalin's country house; Bierut, Osóbka-Morawski and Rola-Zymierski were already there. Our Polish comrades spoke about the difficult situation of their people, who had suffered five years of occupation. The members of the Polish National Liberation Committee and the Krajowa Rada Narodowa dreamt of liberating their native land as soon as possible. It was already agreed jointly that the Krajowa Rada Narodowa would begin its first organisational activities in Lublin.

On July 9, Stalin once again considered the plan of the Kovel offensive (First Byelorussian Front). It provided for:

—the routing of the Kovel-Lublin enemy grouping;

—the capture of Brest in conjunction with the Front's right-wing troops;

—reaching the Vistula on a broad front, and securing a bridgehead on its western bank.

On July 10, I was already back with the troops, where Rokossovsky, Novikov and I worked out the plans for the operations on the left flank of the 1st Byelorussian Front.

On July 11, I left Rokossovsky's headquarters by plane for the 1st Ukrainian Front.

The task of the 1st Ukrainian Front was to strike two powerful blows, one in the direction of Lvov and the other in the direction of Rava-Russkaya and Stanislav with part of the forces. The depth of the operation was about 220-240 kilometres, its frontage 100-120 kilometres.

Concentrated in that sector were 80 divisions, 10 armoured and mechanized corps, 4 separate armoured and self-propelled artillery brigades, 16,100 guns and mortars, 2,050 tanks and self-propelled guns and 3,250 aircraft.

Total troop strength was 1,110,000—this was more than enough for such an action. I thought it expedient to allot some of the forces of the 1st Ukrainian Front to strike at East Prussia. For some reason, however, the Supreme Commander was against it.

I set up my command post in the area of Lutsk so that I could be closer to the Kovel grouping of the 1st Byelorussian Front and to the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

After the destruction of the encircled enemy in the Minsk area, our offensive developed satisfactorily. On some sectors the Germans tried to put up resistance, but were swept away

and forced to retreat all along the front to Siauliai, Kaunas, Grodno, Belostok and Brest.

The offensive of the 1st Ukrainian Front began on July 13 on the Rava-Russkaya sector and proceeded according to plan. The 3rd Guards Army under General Gordov and the 13th Army of General Pukhov did particularly well.

On the Lvov sector, the offensive started on July 14, but for a number of reasons the enemy defence could not be immediately broken. Furthermore, the enemy launched a counter-offensive in the Zolochev area against the 38th Army and forced it to move back. Things improved when the 3rd Guards Tank Army of Rybalko went into action on July 16 in rather difficult conditions.

On July 17, the 4th Armoured Army under Lelyushenko followed the 3rd Guards Tank Army onto the offensive and consolidated the initial success. By the joint efforts of the 60th and 38th Field armies and the 3rd Guards and 4th Tank armies the enemy troops were also pressed back on the Lvov sector. However, our troops advanced slowly.

As July 18 drew to a close, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front had penetrated the Germans' defence and advanced from 50 to 80 kilometres; in doing so they had encircled an enemy group of up to eight divisions in the area of Brody.

On that memorable day the troops of the First Byelorussian Front's left flank began an offensive from the area of Kovel towards Lublin. All the armies of the Front moved into action. I must give credit to the command, headquarters and logistic agencies of the 1st Byelorussian Front for their able and well-organised guidance of the troops and their timely supply of everything required for the operation.

The four Fronts struck powerful blows at the Army Group Centre, crushing the German 3rd Panzer Army and the 4th and 9th Field armies. A breach of up to 400 kilometres wide and up to 500 kilometres deep was made in the enemy strategic front, and the German Command had nothing which could enable it to quickly close the gap.

At this stage of the Byelorussian operation, the East Prussian bastion of the German defence was the main obstacle confronting us. This large enemy group was protected by the natural terrain, and the strong engineering works. To successfully advance on Berlin, we had to break through the enemy defensive in East Prussia on the march without a break in the rhythm of the Fronts.

This would be possible if the advancing troops were to receive reinforcements when required. We estimated that the First Byelorussian Front had to get additionally 300-400

tanks and self-propelled guns, and the Second Byelorussian Front had to receive a field and a Tank army, one rifle corps, and several tank and self-propelled artillery regiments. They also had to receive better air support.

Once these reinforcements had come, all the three Byelorussian Fronts, in my opinion, would be able to seize East Prussia and reach the Vistula up to the Bay of Danzig inclusively, or at the very least, by simultaneously reaching the Vistula, to cut off East Prussia from Central Germany.

After meticulously drafting the possible directions of our offensive and the required forces, I reported my proposals to the Supreme Command in the early hours of July 19...

Soon afterwards I was called to Moscow for discussions with Stalin. However, he refused to accept my plan, and did not agree to reinforce the Fronts on the East Prussian sector nor was the Supreme Command able to assign reserves to the Byelorussian Fronts. I think Stalin made a really serious mistake here, as what was involved was the very complex and bloody East Prussian operation.

In the latter part of July the German High Command found itself in a difficult position, which was further complicated by the offensive begun by the Second and Third Baltic Fronts and the pressure of the Allied expeditionary forces in the West.

German General Buttlar wrote in this connection: "The rout of the Army Group Centre put an end to the organised resistance of the Germans in the East."

Nevertheless, the command of the Army Group Centre found the best possible mode of action in the extremely difficult circumstances. Since it had no solid line of defence and could not form one as the forces were unavailable, the German Command decided to delay the advance of our troops by swift counterblows. These tactics enabled the Germans to deploy in the rear lines troops dispatched from Germany and other sectors of the Soviet-German front.

The striking forces of the 1st Byelorussian Front's left flank included the 47th Army, the 8th Guards Army, the 69th Army and the 2nd Guards Tank Army, supported by the 6th Air Army. The 1st Army of Wojsko Polskie under Lieutenant-General Bierling also operated there. The troops of the 1st Byelorussian Front forced the River Bug and entered Eastern Poland, initiating the liberation of the Polish people from the German occupation.

On July 22, the troops of the 1st Byelorussian Front liberated Chelm. This created a breach, and on July 24, the 2nd Tank Army (under General Radzievsky, who took charge of the Army after General Bogdanov had been

wounded) liberated Poland's key administrative centre of Lublin. On July 25, continuing the advance, army units reached the Vistula in the area of Deblin.

Our troops liberated the prisoners of the Maidanek death camp, where the Nazis had murdered one and a half million people, including old men, women and children. What the eyewitnesses told me was terrifying. The fascist atrocities later were made known to the whole world, and were declared grave crimes against humanity.

On July 28, the troops of the 1st Byelorussian Front crushed the Brest grouping of the Germans and liberated the city of Brest and the legendary Brest Fortress, whose defenders had been among the first to encounter the enemy attack in 1941 and won immortal glory by their mass heroism.

The routing of the German Army Group Centre was carried out in close cooperation with the partisans. During our offensive, Byelorussian guerillas blew up roads and railways, destroyed bridges and other important railway structures. A total of 230 trains with troops and materiel were derailed in the month of July alone. The active operations of the partisans behind enemy lines paralysed his supply and transport agencies, and further undermined the morale of the German officers and men.

The 8th Guards Army and the 69th Army followed the 2nd Tank Army and other mobile formations; on July 27, they reached the Vistula and began crossing it near Magnuszew and Pulawy; these were later to play a historic role, during the liberation of Poland in the Vistula-Oder operation.

The German Command realised the importance of the bridgeheads that the Soviet troops had captured on the Vistula and brought considerable forces into action, including the Hermann Goering SS Panzer Division, against the 8th and 69th armies. During the fierce fighting for the bridgeheads, all the German attacks were beaten back with heavy losses.

I must mention here the skill and determination displayed by General Kolpakchi, commanding the 69th Army, and General Chuikov, who commanded the 8th Guards Army; these two commanders conducted the battle for the seizure and retention of the Vistula bridgeheads with great skill and determination.

Those of our officers and men who first crossed the Vistula and landed on its western bank were real heroes. At the Magnuszew bridgehead I talked with wounded men from the 220th Guards Rifle Regiment of the 79th Guards

Rifle Division. Here is what one of them told me:

"Before dawn our company was ordered to cross the western bank of the Vistula. We were about fifty men, under the command of Lieutenant Burba. As soon as we landed on the opposite bank the Germans opened fire on us, and then attacked. We repulsed the first attack, but a second and third followed. The next day we were attacked continuously by infantry and tanks. After the last and the most fierce attack, there were only twelve men left in our company.

"Just before the last attack began Lieutenant Burba said: 'Boys, there are not many of us left. Reinforcements will come only in the evening; until then we are going to fight to the last drop of our blood but we won't give up our position.'

"Soon we were attacked by tanks and infantry, almost a whole company. When several tanks came close to us our commander threw a bunch of grenades and stopped one; with a bunch of grenades in his hand he hurled himself under another. We beat back the attack, but our commander was killed. Of one entire company, only six men were left. Soon we received reinforcements. The bridgehead remained ours..."

The soldier could not contain his tears as he spoke of his commander's death. I couldn't listen to him without being deeply moved; it was painful to know that such fine men were dying for our country. Lieutenant Burba was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Another act of heroism was performed by soldier Khlyustin, member of the Young Communist League, from the 4th Company of the same 220th Regiment. Like Lieutenant Burba, he threw himself under a German tank with a bunch of grenades, thus halting an enemy attack at the price of his life. Komsomol member Khlyustin was also posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Both at the initial stage of the war, and now, when it was drawing to a close, the Soviet citizen would readily sacrifice his life for the sake of his Motherland...

The successful actions by the Kovel striking forces of the 1st Byelorussian Front, which reached the Vistula in such a short time, were crucial to the outcome of the Lvov-Sandomierz operation, which initially did not proceed as well on the Lvov sector as the Front Command and the GHQ had expected.

Here I would like once again to allude to reconnaissance, the importance of reconnaissance in warfare. Military experience has shown that intelligence data and the correct analysis of it should be the basis for appraising the situation,

making decisions and planning operations. If the intelligence data is wrong or misinterpreted, the reasoning of all command echelons is inevitably affected, and the operation will not develop as planned.

When preparations were being made for the operation on the Lvov sector, the intelligence agencies of the 1st Ukrainian Front failed to disclose the enemy's entire defence system and to locate the operational reserves of the German Command, first of all its armoured troops. The result was that the Front Command could not foresee the possible counter-manoeuvre by the enemy when his defence was penetrated. Artillery preparation and air support were poorly planned due to inadequate study of the enemy fire layout.

Artillery fire and bombardment are most effective when shelling or bombing is carried out against very specific targets, not at areas or probable targets. Area shelling or bombing cannot destroy an enemy defence system; this is what happened on the Lvov sector—a lot of shelling and bombing, but almost no real results.

Another important factor in understanding mistakes made in preparing for the operation is the armour's support of the infantry's attack and offensive.

Advancing infantry is naturally vulnerable to enemy fire. All fire emplacements surviving the artillery preparation—a machine-gun, a gun, a dug-in tank, a pillbox, etc. can "pin down" the advancing infantry and retard its progress. In these conditions, tanks can be of tremendous value when they accompany the infantry, and their fire neutralises the enemy weapons not silenced by the artillery preparation.

All this postulate was totally ignored in this instance. I cannot see why these mistakes are never mentioned when the Lvov-Sandomierz operation is discussed by historians. They must be analysed and explained to our young people, so that the necessary conclusions can be drawn from the past.

The defeat of a large German grouping in the area of Brody and the successful advance of the First Byelorussian Front's left wing on the Lublin sector and the First Ukrainian Front's right wing on the Rava-Russkaya sector enabled the command of the 1st Ukrainian Front to send Rybalko's Tank Army to envelop Lvov from the north and north-west. The aim of the turning manoeuvre was to sever the routes of withdrawal of the enemy's Lvov grouping on the River San, capture Peremyshl, and by delivering a blow from the west to help the 38th, 60th and 4th Tank armies capture Lvov. At that time the troops of the Front's right wing were continuing to advance in the general direction of Sandomierz.

During my talk with Konev on July 22, we agreed that the seizure by the 3rd Tank Army of the rear communications on the River San would force the enemy to leave Lvov. In fact we both came to the conclusion that the surrender of Lvov by the Germans was practically a fait accompli, and one day sooner or later did not matter much.

But at dawn on July 23, Konev got me on the phone and said that Stalin had just called him. "What is your and Zhukov's grand idea about Sandomierz?" he asked. "We first have to take Lvov and only then think of Sandomierz."

"And what was your reply?" I asked Konev.

"I reported that the 3rd Tank Army is striking at the enemy's Lvov grouping from the rear, and that Lvov would soon be taken."

Konev and I agreed that during the day I would phone the Supreme Commander, while the Front's troops would continue operations on the sectors assigned to them.

When I learned that Lublin had been liberated by the 2nd Tank Army of the First Byelorussian Front, I rang up the Supreme Commander. He was still at his flat, and had already heard about it.

After listening to my report on the actions of the 1st Ukrainian Front, the Supreme Commander asked: "When do you expect Lvov to be taken?"

"Not later than in two to three days," was my reply.

Stalin said: "Khrushchev phoned, and he does not agree with the assignment given to Rybalko's army. The army is not taking part in the offensive on Lvov, and he thinks that that can hold things up. You and Konev are in a rush to get to the Vistula. It won't run away from you. Get Lvov quickly over with first."

All I could do was to tell the Supreme Commander that Lvov would be taken before our troops reached the Vistula. I did not want to upset Konev with the details of the talk.

As a result of a brilliant 120-km enveloping manoeuvre by General Rybalko's Tank Army, the push from the east by the 38th and the 60th armies, and the fighting by the 4th Tank Army in the southern part of Lvov, the enemy retreated from Lvov to Sambor. On July 27, Lvov was liberated by the Soviet troops.

Belostok was liberated on July 27. On that day a Supreme Command directive approved our decision to exploit the blow of the 1st Ukrainian Front in the direction of the Vistula and to secure a bridgehead there as the 1st Byelorussian Front had done. The general purpose of this operation was to ensure a subsequent offensive aimed at completing the liberation of Poland.

On receiving the Supreme Command directive, on July 28, Front Commander Konev ordered the 3rd Armoured Army to make a dash towards the Vistula, by the close of the day seize a bridgehead as it proceeded ahead and then take Sandomierz. The 13th Army of Pukhov was ordered to reach the line between Sandomierz and the mouth of the Wisloka and secure a bridgehead on the Konary-Polaniec Front. The 1st Guards Tank Army of General Katukov was to strike at Baranów and reach the area of Bogoria.

The 5th Guards Army under Lieutenant-General Zhadov was also advancing towards Sandomierz.

One must not ignore the exceptional bravery, initiative and cooperation of all arms of the service of the 1st Ukrainian Front involved in the difficult crossing of the broad and deep Vistula. I did not witness it myself, but what I heard from officers and generals was astounding. The engineers showed particular courage and organisation.

The German Command had exhausted its reserves in the Byelorussian and then Lvov-Sandomierz operations, and was unable to put up any real resistance to the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front crossing the Vistula. Marshal Konev's troops firmly established themselves on the Sandomierz bridgehead.

On July 29, the Supreme Commander phoned and congratulated me by saying I had been awarded a second Gold Medal of Hero of the Soviet Union. Then came a ring from Kalinin[8], who also extended his congratulations.

"Yesterday the State Committee for Defence, acting on Stalin's proposal, decided to decorate you for the Byelorussian operation and the liberation of the Ukraine."

On that memorable day I received many telegrams and words of congratulation from friends and comrades. But my greatest joy was the fact that the Soviet Army had taken a firm stand on the western bank of the Vistula and was ready to fulfil its liberation mission in Poland, and then to invade Nazi Germany and crush it completely.

The German Command realised the value of our bridgeheads on the Berlin sector, and did everything it possibly could to wipe out the Magnuszew, Puławy and Sandomierz bridgeheads. The enemy brought in large forces, including armoured and mechanised divisions, but it was all too late.

The 1st Byelorussian and the 1st Ukrainian Fronts had concentrated so many troops and weapons in those areas that the Germans could not throw us back across the Vistula.

In these two months the Soviet troops had routed two powerful strategic groupings of Germans, liberated Byelo-

russia, completed the liberation of the Ukraine, and freed much of Lithuania and Eastern Poland.

In these battles the First, Second and Third Byelorussian Fronts and the First Baltic Front routed about 70 German divisions; 30 of them were surrounded and taken prisoner or destroyed. Over 30 divisions were routed and eight divisions completely wiped out in the offensive by the 1st Ukrainian Front on the Lvov-Sandomierz sector.

The Byelorussian operation vividly demonstrated the ability of Soviet commanders of all levels to quickly encircle and destroy large enemy formations. The skill of the commanders, coupled with the competent actions and valour of the troops, resulted in the collapse of the Germans' strongest grouping in the Berlin strategic direction.

The defeat of the Army Groups Centre and Northern Ukraine, the capture of three major bridgeheads on the Vistula, and the reaching of Warsaw brought our striking Fronts closer to Berlin. It was now only 600 kilometres away.

The routing of the Jassy-Kishinev group by the Second and Third Ukrainian Fronts and the liberation of Moldavia created the conditions for the withdrawal of Romania and Hungary from the war.

All this brought nearer the collapse of the fascist bloc and the defeat of Nazi Germany.

In the Western strategic direction, the front line had advanced 600 kilometres. By the end of August, it ran west of Jelgava, Siauliai, Suwałki, Ostrolęka, Pultusk, Praga (a Warsaw suburb), Magnuszew, Sandomierz, Sanok, Drogobych and Chernovtsy, where it joined the line of the Second Ukrainian Front.

On the north-western sector, the Baltic Fronts, along with the Leningrad Front and Baltic Fleet, were preparing an offensive blow against the Army Group North, in order to liberate all the Baltic Republics as soon as possible, and to defeat another powerful German force which had been pressed against the sea.

In the Western theatre, the military situation was also unfavourable for Germany. After heavy losses in the fighting in Normandy and unable to move troops in from other Fronts to strengthen their forces in Northern France, the Germans began to rapidly retreat all along the front towards the German border and the Siegfried Line.

The Allied troops were pursuing the enemy on all sectors. After capturing Rome, the Allies intended to continue their offensive in Northern Italy. Liberation movements quickly spread all over Europe and the Balkans. The Germans felt them, especially in Yugoslavia, Poland, Albania, Greece

and France. The German High Command was forced to detain considerable troops to fight the Resistance and the national liberation forces.

The Allied and Soviet air forces were at the same time inflicting heavy damage on key industrial facilities in Germany, thus aggravating the economic, military and political situation.

It appeared that the German High Command would quickly withdraw its Army Group North (60 divisions, over 1,200 tanks and 7,000 guns) in order to save the troops and build up deep defences on a more narrow front both in the east and in the west.

However, the German Command could not rise above considerations of political prestige, thus bringing closer Germany's collapse. Hitler still evidently believed that an agreement could be reached with Western reactionary forces, so that they could jointly wage a battle against the "Communist menace" in the future. In general, however, in the battles for the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Baltic Republics, Hitler's military and political leaders proved unable to understand the situation and find the correct solution at that crucial moment.

A characteristic of the 1944 summer campaign was the further build-up of the combat strength of the Soviet Armed Forces and the increasing operational and strategic skills of our high command and headquarters.

In the summer of 1944 the Soviet troops carried out seven major operations to surround and smash groups of German troops. This was many more than in previous campaigns. The more important of them were the Byelorussian, Jassy-Kishinev and Lvov-Sandomierz operations in which 147 enemy divisions were crushed. As a result the German defensive front was broken over a 2,200-km stretch from the Western Dvina to the Black Sea. On some sectors our troops advanced up to 700 kilometres.

All twelve Fronts, as well as the Northern, Baltic and Black Sea Fleets, and all lake and river flotillas took part in the offensive operations in the summer campaign of 1944.

On August 22, I was phoned from Moscow and told that I had been ordered by the Supreme Commander to report at General Headquarters immediately. I was informed that I was to go on a special mission for the State Committee for Defence.

I bid farewell to my friends and comrades-in-arms and flew to Moscow on August 23. I arrived in the capital in the evening and immediately went to the General Staff.

1969

OLES GONCHAR

The Standard Bearers

(*Chapters*)

O Russian land!
Far are you now beyond the hills!
The Lay of the Warfare
Waged by Igor

It was several days since the forward troops had pushed across the frontier and disappeared behind the hills of that alien land. At the river crossing, frontier guards were examining the papers of squads and individual men on their way to catch up with their units. They had put up the striped frontier post again and were now erecting the sentry box. The frontier! We had come back to it, and the sentry had taken up his station at the very spot where he stood on June 22, 1941. We had forgotten nothing; there was much that we had learnt. We were alive, more mature now, and the wiser for what we had been through. And are you alive, you, enemy airman with the Iron Cross on your chest—you who on that black Sunday long before dropped the first bomb on this sentry box? Did you think then that the hour of your doom would be striking soon, that men of the new, battle-born Second Ukrainian Front would be back in their khaki beside this river-nay, that they would be crossing it? "It's destiny!" you would have said. Aye! the destiny of just armies is ever glorious.

The time for the barrage was up, and the din was subsiding gradually, like the sea after a storm. Now that only single batteries and mortars were firing, everybody could hear a steady, even rumbling far over on the left. They listened as if spellbound.

"It's over by Jassy!"

"That means it's starting all along the line!"

The smoke was thinning, and parts of the height emerged once more from the tawny clouds. The whole of it had been

Oles Gonchar (b. 1918)—Ukrainian Soviet prose writer, Lenin and State Prizes winner. He volunteered to serve with a student battalion, and received his baptism of fire in the battles at Kiev in 1941. At the end of the war he was serving in the units which liberated Czechoslovakia.

Gonchar achieved literary fame with his trilogy *The Standard Bearers* (1946-1948), in which he describes the liberation of the peoples of Europe. His later novels include *Tronka* (1963), *The Cathedral* (1968), *The Cyclone* (1970), *The Shore of Love* (1976), *Your Dawn* (1979), all of which reveal a highly personal view of the world and a poetic literary style.

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ploughed up by shells in that one hour. It seemed strange that it still existed at all. Even the pillboxes were still there, only they were quite far now—the earth had been blasted away—and loomed on the slopes like enormous white skulls. The batteries continued to pound them, blinding and deafening the panic-stricken garrisons with their relentless fire.

The young telephone operator popped suddenly out of his dugout, his round head bare and his shoulders littered with earth, shouted at the top of his voice, "The infantry's going over!" and disappeared again.

"The infantry's going over!" The words flashed like lightning from man to man, even to the gunners beyond the hill.

"They're going over!"

"They've started! They're moving!..."

Like word of hope, the magic news travelled all down the line, through the staffs and batteries, and to the depots in the rear. The infantry's going over!

With bated breath, Chernysh saw through the smoke little grey spots appearing on the slopes of the elevation. Tiny, barely visible, they kept all eyes riveted upon them. Time and again they vanished in the explosions, seemed to disappear for good, but the smoke cleared, and the little grey things came to life again and crawled up the incline like ants after a shower. And everybody, from the gun layer to the general, watched these moving grey dots without taking his eyes from them. This was a living force that nothing could withstand.

From the command post Bryansky gave orders for the company to shift to the very foot of the elevation. Sagaida appeared on the parapet, tousled and beaming, and gave the order he loved best in the world:

"Cease fire! Dismantle!"

That meant—advance. The telephone operator proudly informed headquarters:

"I'm disconnecting."

In a few minutes the weapon-pits were empty. The heavy footplates, the bipods, the barrels were already on the backs of their crews, and the men were going down with them into the trench.

Standing in a recess at the side, Sagaida let the company file past and made sure nothing had been forgotten. At the head of the file, treading with a buoyant elasticity, came Chernysh, face flushed, head raised, large clear eyes shining under dark brows delicate as a girl's. Then came tall Buzko, bending under his burden and looking down at

his feet as if he wanted to memorise every step he took. Khoma Khayetsky, that irrepressible wag, strode along rapidly, his magnificent whiskers twisted into the semblance of a ram's horns. Gai was hung all over with trenching tools, and they rattled on him like the armour on some knight of old; he looked at Sagaida, at the other men, at everything around him, with a frank, good-natured gaze. There were the inseparable Blazhenko brothers, the grime making their faces look darker than ever. Denis had his mortar barrel on his shoulder and was carrying the sights as well; Roman held a crate of ammunition in his uninjured hand.

"Blazhenko!" Sagaida called to the elder, but both of them stopped.

"Yes, Comrade Lieutenant of the Guards!"

"How many times have I told you it's Guards Lieutenant, not Lieutenant of the Guards?"

"Beg pardon, I forgot, Comrade ... Lieutenant of the Guards!"

"Hand over that crate!"

"He's in my crew," Denis interposed. "He's carrying it on my orders."

"Hand it over!"

"Comrade Guards Lieutenant," Denis insisted, "you know, you can't cancel my orders over my head. A combat order is..."

"So you know the regulations, do you?" Sagaida said, and took away Roman's crate by force, demanding: "Why didn't you report you were wounded? Off you go!"

Roman blinked, looking from Sagaida to Denis and back again.

"Off you go ... with your brother!"

Sagaida picked up the crate himself and set off too, bringing up the rear of the company.

The trench went down and down. Sagaida could see nearly all the men's heads, and their bronzed, sinewy necks. The heads bobbed up and down, as if they had no bodies belonging to them and were floating in a stream, rocking gently. In some places the trench was timbered over, and entering one of these dark tunnels, Khoma Khayetsky called out in his Podolia singsong:

"Oh dearie, dearie me! ... It's like going down to hell!"

"You thought you were going to heaven, did you?" somebody laughed.

That night the mortars entrenched in their new post, in a gully at the foot of the elevation. Sleep was out of the question. The action was still going on. By nightfall, pill-boxes 14, 17 and 18 had been captured; a number of others

were surrounded, but their fire still raked nearly all the ground we had gained. The company was digging in. The men worked, panting; the picks slashed away in the dark, striking sparks when they hit on stones.

With nightfall ammunition columns made for the height, clattering over a road which the day's bombardment had littered with shattered carts and horses' carcasses. Picking their way among the wreckage, they rattled through the darkness, rushed up to the foot of the hill, swung round, piled out the ammunition boxes and dashed off for the next consignment. A whole mountain of ammunition grew up, and Bryansky detailed nearly half the company to haul it up to the mortar position.

Like a procession of shadows, the men wandered through the night with the boxes on their backs, dropping on their faces whenever a shell bit into the hard ground nearby. Khayetsky, blessed with a remarkably keen hearing, was always first to catch the approaching screech of a shell or the whine of a heavy mortar bomb.

"Here she comes!" he called, himself already flat on the ground, like a withered autumn leaf. The blouse gathered in folds on his back.

"Oh dearie, dearie me!"

He was certain for some reason that a bomb would bore into the small of his back. Not his arm or his leg, but his back; he could already feel the chills running down it. He dug his fingers into the ground, breaking his nails, and whispered:

"Don't let it get me!"

The shell dropped wide of them sending splinters whistling over their heads and thudding down on the ground like so many ripe pears. Khayetsky thereupon lifted his head before anybody else, his whiskers thrust jauntily forward.

"Look where it's dropped!" he announced, as if the others hadn't seen it.

"Get up!" Chernysh ordered.

The men shouldered their loads in silence and pushed on, stooping under the weight.

"Everybody there!"

"Certainly they are!"

This was already their fourth trip that night.

"A smoke would be good," someone said close behind Chernysh. On the eve of the drive the troops had been issued tobacco.

There was a trench of some sort running nearby: Chernysh said they might halt in it and light up.

It was past midnight. The men put down their boxes on the parapet, so they would be easier to pick up, and squatted

down. The impressions of the day's fighting, and the hard work they were doing now, had been exhausting. But the safety of the trench had an instantaneous tonic effect. Cigarette ends gleamed and tongues began to wag. "How little a man needs to laugh and feel contented," Chernysh found himself thinking.

The night was blue and cool. Here and there the scarlet flowers of the explosions were still blossoming. On the elevation, flares hung for a few moments over the lines of infantry, then dropped to earth like dazzling ears of corn under the sickle. And over beyond it, the whole sky glowed with a dim, sinister glow. The Romanian rear, the whole of Romania was aflame.[1]

"Drat you!" This suddenly from Gai.

"What's the matter?"

"There's an arm here..."

Chernysh bent over the parapet and saw a twisted arm that hung down into the trench. It was in the way, and with a feeling of squeamishness that he did not like to admit, he picked it up and flung it aside. Though cold and hard, it left his hand sticky. He kept rubbing earth on the palm as he went, but for days after, whenever he started to eat, his hands seemed to give off a sickening odour.

They were nearing the worst spot of all, a small glade at the entrance to the gully. It was still swept by enemy machine guns, and Chernysh gave orders to lie down, and dropped down himself. He squirmed over the pitted, stinking ground. Bullets sang all the time, some passing overhead, others burying themselves close by in something soft, like dough. Corpses kept blocking the way. And behind him, the men crawled, panting heavily as they dragged the boxes after them.

There were moments when Chernysh felt as if it wasn't night at all, but broad daylight, and the enemy could see everything, down to the star on his cap. He would hide his head behind some dead body while he fought down this fancy; then, every nerve and fibre tensed, he pushed on, knees and elbows scraping, as if he were swimming over something hard and bumpy.

Suddenly there was a scream behind him, a horrible full-voiced scream, especially terrifying here in the dark, where they had hardly raised their voices above a whisper.

"Brothers! Pals!..."

The voice, shrill and piercing, was so inhumanly distorted that Chernysh could not tell whose it was.

"Brothers!..."

So blood-curdling was that scream in the night that surely

everyone must hear it on the whole of this great hill, on both of its slopes—everyone must come rushing to save this human life.

But instead Chernysh felt himself driven forward, away from that scream, and he could hear the men behind him crawling quicker too, and their breath coming faster and more laboured. Bullets whistled thicker and thicker through the air. At last Chernysh got to a rock where they could shelter and pause. The bullets didn't reach here.

"What have I done?" he thought with sudden horror. "What have I done?"

The men were appearing out of the dark and gathering silently around him, without lifting their heads from the ground.

"Who's missing?" Chernysh all but shrieked, angry he knew not with whom. "Who's missing?"

Two men were missing. Buzko and Vakulenko. Chernysh, ready to do anything, turned desperately and crawled back. Let him be killed, but he couldn't face Bryansky that way. Somebody grabbed his foot.

"Don't... Let me. ..."

It was Gai. Without waiting for an answer, he rustled off in the dark like an eel and headed in the direction of the groans, picking his way among the corpses. Bullets sang and plopped; once in a while they gave a ring, probably against somebody's trenching tool. Gai took no notice of these sounds, he could hear another that was infinitely more important: a quiet gurgling, like pigeons cooing in the sun. He put out his hand and felt a body, still warm, and dank with sweat. By the homemade boot he could tell that it was Buzko. The body shrank, straightened out, shrank again, and all the time there was the sound of that soft cooing—blood spurting from under the armpit. Gai put his ear to Buzko's chest. A hush fell, as if the whole of the universe were mute with amazement: the heart had ceased to beat.

Gai rummaged in the pockets, took out Buzko's purse and stock of cartridges, and pushed on again. A few yards further along he found Vakulenko: his cap had slipped off and his big bald head gleamed in the dark. This one had been killed outright: the bullet had entered the neck and come out on the other side.

Back at the rock, Gai handed over the two men's papers to Chernysh, keeping back only the cartridges. They all got up again, giving one another a hand with the 100-pound boxes. Machine guns chattered in the dark. Flares tried to reach the sky, only to sink exhausted to the ground and die in a scattering of cold sparks. No one said a word all the way.

At the mortar post Chernysh sought out Bryansky and reported that the ammunition party was back and two men had been killed. Bryansky listened gravely, asked about the details.

"A pity," he said after a pause. "A pity. Particularly about Vakulenko. He would have made a good gunner in time. I was watching him. Well ..." Bryansky looked pensive for a moment. "Well ... take your men, old man, and ... off you go again. Ammunition's the word, my lad. There'll be another show in the morning."

Chernysh saluted and gave the order for the fifth trip.

* * *

A "show" did start in the morning, and never stopped all day. All the infantry battalions were brought into action, and they surrounded some pillboxes that were still firing on the left. The enemy, for his part, had also brought up considerable infantry troops and was sending them over in one counter-attack after another, frantic to save the trapped pillbox garrisons. Several times the infantry came to close quarters on the very crest of the hill.

The roar and din never ceased; a pall of smoke hung over the elevation, obscuring the sun.

Bryansky was controlling the fire from the observation post of Infantry Company No.7. He had orders to concentrate on a vital Romanian trench, which ran to the height from the enemy rear lines, weaving into the intricate pattern of the defences. His periscope gave him a fine view of this trench; he could actually see that its sides were lined with wickerwork. He had been pounding and pounding it ever since morning. In correcting the aim, he hardly glanced at the gunnery tables—he knew them practically by heart, his mathematical memory was extraordinarily well developed.

When a bomb struck outside the trench, even if only a few yards away, Bryansky could not contain his exasperation.

"Bunglers! Bunglers! Bunglers!" he muttered after every poor shot; eyes glued to the target, he cursed into the mouthpiece and ordered them to repeat his figures—he was sure the men must have balled them up. When, on the other hand, the bomb landed full on the trench, filling it with smoke, Bryansky's face lit up with satisfaction. He would seize Shovkun by the shoulder and make him look.

"See that? Straddle! Plumb on the target! Good man! Well done!"

And he'd make a hurried note on his pad. To Bryansky the management of every action was a creative process, something to be studied and profited by. His opinion of an engagement was based not only on the final results, although these were, of course, the main thing. It took into account the efficiency of preparations and execution, the way the different factors had been brought to bear and the inevitable complications and surprises had been dealt with. Even the smallest of skirmishes was for Bryansky either "sloppy", as he used to put it—with needless casualties—or clean-cut, exact, with losses kept down to the minimum. When the company commanders were summoned to Battalion Headquarters to analyse the latest engagement, Bryansky would say:

"The enemy group in such-and-such a wood was mopped up neatly, efficiently, artistically."

And now too, while directing the fire of his own company, Bryansky was keeping track of what the other mortar companies and batteries were doing; and all his observations he passed on to Shovkun.

"Look, look how Sergeyev's laying down that fan-pattern! Just you look at him! He's got them! Got the whole lot of them!"

Shovkun, who didn't know any Sergeyev and had the faintest of nodding acquaintances with fan-patterns, marvelled not a little at his chief's irrepressible energy.

"But surely, Comrade Lieutenant, you don't have to trouble your head about that Sergeyev?" he ventured mildly. "Haven't you enough to do with your own company? Are you responsible for that Sergeyev too?"

"Shovkun!" Bryansky was unwontedly stern. "We're responsible for everybody—and everything!"

And leaning on the dry clay of the parapet, he turned back to the scene of action.

Meanwhile, the gully below, where his mortars were stationed, was in an uproar. The overheated mortars croaked, men shouted, cursed, ran back and forth. An outsider might have thought they had gone mad and did not know what they were doing, trapped in this cage filled with sweltering heat. Only on looking more closely would he have realised that clockwork order and efficiency prevailed here.

There was the one relatively safe spot near the elevation, and everybody who had the right and opportunity had collected in it. Besides Bryansky's mortars, the battalion command post was here with all its personnel, even down to the clerks. These, with their endless dispatches spread out on their knees, lent the scene a particularly businesslike

and confident air. Then again the dressing stations of two battalions had pitched camp in the gully, and by now there were several dozen wounded gathered around them. They lay or sat about at the bottom, waiting for night to fall. A staff officer with a Moldavian interpreter was questioning the day's first prisoners. They were still crazed with fright, wet with perspiration, and could remember nothing but our bombardment of the day before. A shell-shocked sergeant, stammering and talking very loud, was telling some lightly wounded men about a charge he'd laid under a pillbox—the thing had stunned him because he hadn't got far enough away when it went off. Another fellow, a mere lad, was describing comically how he'd caught a Romanian who, not expecting visitors, had opened the armour-plated rear door of his pillbox.

"*Bună ziva*, I says. Then I whack him over the head with my rifle butt and chuck in a grenade through the doorway..."

The heat was unbearable. The gully was brimming with a transparent, shimmering blaze. And not a breeze to stir the hot air.

Bryansky's men stood by the mortars, sweating hard, and dark as blackamoors. But their spirits were high, for all the time news was coming through of more pillboxes being captured.

Khayetsky sat putting extra charges into the bombs. His face was all grimy and his eyes red for lack of sleep, but he kept up a steady stream of banter, and his white teeth flashed in a grin beneath his whiskers.

"Comrade Lieutenant," he called to Sagaida, tossing a bomb lightly in his hand. "Won't some Fritz like to catch this little pickle?"

A shell burst somewhere further up, and splinters chortled overhead like a flock of well-fed quails. This disturbed Khayetsky a little, and throwing up his head, he brandished the bomb in the enemy's direction.

"You can't do that, you know," he shouted, to the whole company's amusement. "Where are you shooting? What do you want? D'you mean to say you're trying to kill me? That wouldn't be a very nice thing to do! I've got a wife at home, and two youngsters, and my old father! Yes, indeed, I've got to live..."

Roman Blazhenko was charging bombs too. It was light work and his wound didn't interfere.

"I'd be ashamed to sit idle," he said, "when everybody's got so much to do, more than they can manage... After all, I get my rations like everybody else."

Everybody knew he was a fiend for work. Without it he languished, like corn in a drought. Roman was a quiet and gentle soul. Sometimes he and Denis, like a couple of singers at a fair, would start up a plaintive ditty that they alone knew about "the sand that's covered up my true love's tracks," and before very long Roman would be in a melting mood. But no one ventured to laugh at him or molest him because there was Denis to be reckoned with—a husky fellow of some thirty years, with beetling black brows, the eye of a hawk, and always ready to take up cudgels for his brother.

Over the telephone crouched Makovei—they all called him by the pet name of Makoveichik, because he was just a kid, only 18, and had a nice likeable face with a funny broad nose. Makoveichik was short, but he had a tremendous chest that was always thrust out, and on his shoulders perched a big mobile head, which, Sagaida used to say, had been meant for a giant and had landed in Makoveichik's possession by mistake. Sagaida thought it a great lark to pass his outspread palm over Makoveichik's head, from the top right down to the chin.

"Don't, now! Don't maul!" Makoveichik would cry, and he'd go for Sagaida, because this "mauling" meant that right now you could fool around with the lieutenant too.

When the company was still in reserve and used to sing a lot in the evenings, Bryansky got Makoveichik transferred from the infantry because he was a great one for starting off the singing. Sometimes these musical gifts got him into hot water. On duty at the phone at night, he would start warbling into the mouthpiece to kill the time, fascinating unknown and unseen telephone girls, until the furious commander of signals would give him three fatigues out of turn and threaten to break the earphones over his head into the bargain. Sagaida, however, refused to let any man of his be punished by anyone else, so instead of the fatigues, he would give Makoveichik three "mauls" with his palm, and there the punishment would end.

But right now Makoveichik had other things than singing to think about. He sat curled up over the telephone, with the earphone tied to his head. He passed on Bryansky's orders, his praises and curses, and also snatches of overheard conversations about the position with the pillboxes; and all the time he was hoping and praying the connection mightn't be broken again. Six times today he had gone running up the open slope to mend the line, and each time the older men had looked after him compassionately, as if he were going to his death—for everybody was really very fond of him. True, he didn't come from their own part of the country

and even poked fun saucily at their way of talking. But they didn't really mind—the kid was young enough to be the son of most of them, and perhaps reminded them of their own children and home. Each time he came back from the line, appearing suddenly on the ledge above them and jumping down as if from the sky, the company would give a sigh of relief:

"Makoveichik! Safe and sound!"

And Sagaida, as a sign of special favour, would "maul" him a few times when he got him in his clutches.

But the line did break again. Loth to believe it, Makoveichik shouted into the mouthpiece for a while and swore at his opposite number at the observation post. But no reply came and, swearing under his breath, he clambered out of the trench. He asked Khayetsky for his pocket-knife to trim the ends of the wire. Khoma didn't like to part with the knife, and spent a long time rummaging for it in pockets crammed with miscellaneous belongings.

"Hurry up!" Makoveichik called. "I can see you grudge handing it over!"

"Mind you don't lose it, now!"

"Suppose I don't come back myself?"

"I want that knife back regardless."

Makoveichik took hold of the wire and followed it. At first the line ran between clumps of trees, and he felt safe enough. But now it was stretching uphill, and pretty soon Makoveichik was out in the open. He had a feeling of being stark naked. No one anywhere, the grass all burnt up, and shells bursting all over the hillside. He flattened on the ground and squirmed forward, the wire in his hand skinning his fingers. The line entered a disused trench, ran along it for a while, then emerged again and stretched on up the slope.

The sun stood high overhead. The perspiration poured into Makoveichik's eyes and his lips were dry and salty. A shell dropped nearby. The hot blast swept over him, he felt to see if he was whole, and squirmed on again through the acrid, suffocating powder smoke, alone as if he were in a desert waste. Looking at this height, he had never imagined it was so big—and now he seemed to have been crawling over it a solid hour. Here at last was the break in the wire. He used his teeth to trim the ends, forgetting about the knife in his pocket. The break mended, he started back. It was much easier downhill. He felt good at having fixed the line and the shells didn't seem quite so bad. There was still a battered tree standing here and there; some of the flowers hadn't been mown down yet and smelt sweet as they drooped in the heat.

Suddenly Makoveichik stood rooted to the ground.

A lanky Romanian in a green uniform and *postols* unexpectedly rose up from behind a little knoll a few metres beyond. Despite his astonishment Makovei noticed that the Romanian was wearing *postols*. The encounter evidently came as a surprise to the foreigner, too, for he froze, poised for flight, breathing heavily. They both stood there a moment or so, dumbfounded and confused. Had they just run a little further they might well have collided head-on. The Romanian, skinny and swarthy with a peeling aquiline nose stared at Makoveichik and Makoveichik stared back. This went on for a few seconds, but to them it seemed as though they had stood there for a long time, that fate itself had brought them face to face.

Then suddenly, as though on command, both of them turned on their heels and took off in opposite directions.

Only after he had run a fair distance did Makovei feel the machine-gun bouncing around and painfully striking his back. Makovei had clean forgotten about his Shpagin machine-gun when he came upon the Romanian, just as the Romanian had most likely forgotten about his rifle.

Makoveichik quickly grabbed the gun and looked back. But there was no question of catching up. The *postols* of the green Romanian were already far off, now appearing, now disappearing in the folds of the hill. His rifle danced forgotten on his faded back. The telephone operator fired off a long round after him. Without halting his flight the Romanian looked around, bent over and ... slapped his behind as if to say, see if you can hit me here!

"Taunt me, will you, Polenta!" Makovei yelled, firing off another round though the Romanian had vanished behind a knoll. "Running so hard your bones are knocking together!"

Even so, Makoveichik himself was somehow ashamed and giddy all at once.

"Lucky for you my machine-gun was slung on my back," the telephone operator mentally admonished the Romanian in high spirits. "Otherwise I would have shown you: *nushti ruseshti!* Where did he come from, anyway? Maybe he was signaller too. Probably got lost and now he's running around like a chicken with its head cut off."

Back at the emplacement Makovei couldn't refrain from telling the other fellows about his embarrassing adventure.

The fellows gave him a hard time:

"Tsk-tsk, nightingale!"

"Missed your 'tongue'!"

"You should've said 'Hände Hoch!'" Khaetsky shouted.

"I forgot," Makoveichik confessed awkwardly. "When it happened my mind went blank. Those eyes of his—like two huge black wells, glittering... You couldn't just up and shoot him..."

"Watch out, Makovei, next time you lose your head it'll be all over for you!"

The whole company mercilessly poked fun at their nightingale, but in their hearts they made allowance for his greenness. Besides, it was his first battle.

As he sat over his telephone Makovei took the fellows' amiable kidding with fairly good grace. Evidently his conscience did not bother him too much that he had let the poor fellow, more shepherd than soldier, get away right from under his nose, that he had not once fired at the Romanian's frightened eyes that shone like prunes.

"At least you didn't lose my knife," Khoma Khaetsky said with relief, getting his yatagan from Makovei. "It wouldn't be hard to lose your pants hightailing it away from a scrawny polenta like that!"

"And what if I'd lost it?" the youngster said in arch defiance.

"I'd have skinned you alive and used your hide for tobacco pouches, that's what!"

"Just wait," Makovei thought cheerfully, "just wait... Is that really it? Someday I'll be as great a fighter as our regimental 'wolves'.[2] After all, they say that 'soldiers are made, not born...' "

Makoveichik's heart felt light and free; there was so much sunlight around that the very sky was a dazzling white; and down below, a long way off, beyond the embankment, you could see the meadows, with the quivering haze over them looking like a flock of pearly white ewes. And in those meadows, Makoveichik recalled, whitetrousered Romanians were out grazing their flocks, and the sheep had little tinkling bells around their necks.

Sunny springtime choruses sang in the little telephone operator's heart.

* * *

At last the height fell.

This was the following night, just before daybreak, and Makoveichik was the first to hear about it. All at once the line was alive with a delighted buzz of congratulations. The Romanians had fallen back during the night. No one knew yet that they had fallen back for the last time, that that night Romania, enveloped in flames, had surrendered.

The infantry was on the move. Signalsmen strolled about

the slopes, winding the wire on their reels; the supply columns rolled towards the height, and this time they did not come back, but stayed there at the foot of it, a huge noisy camp. The morning was fine and clear, as after a fall of rain and hail. Demolition squads laid dozens of kilograms of explosive under the empty pillboxes, and these rose roaring out of the ground and reared up on end, practically undamaged; they reminded one of fantastic monsters, their metal girders thrust out like misshapen paws.

With the mortars on their backs, Bryansky's men got moving. The bracing freshness of the summer morning bathed their sleepless eyes and cooled their battle-grimed, long unwashed faces as one after another they climbed the slope in Bryansky's wake. The backs of their shirts had faded in these past few days, and were stiff with dried perspiration.

Ahead of Chernysh moved Gai, bending under a heavy footplate that Buzko had been cleaning and carrying only a few days before. Slung there on his back, it gleamed in the sun like a ploughshare.

At the top they paused to rest. Far over on the right, the Carpathian summits shone rosy in the morning sun. The quiet, peaceful Seret wound sparkling among the grey-green fields. As far as the eye could see, leafy villages dotted the misty plain, with white churches rising above their profuse orchards. One might think there had never been any war there at all, and no one had ever heard about it. Surely the cattle lowed there just as they always had done when driven out in the mornings, and an ancient old man went about the streets, shouting out the laws to the sound of his cymbals. And only this height here stood scorched, pitted, gashed, as if a hurricane had swept over it, covering it with corpses and tatters of clothing, with abandoned weapons, gas masks and all the rubbish with which war litters the earth. And rearing over all this wreckage of death were the concrete pillboxes that our sappers had blasted out of the ground.

"Pull them up, pull them up," Khayetsky cried, as if the sappers could hear him. "Pull them up, right by their iron roots! And we'll uproot the bastards who spread this filth on earth."

Parties of sappers probed the whole slope with mine detectors, marked the mine fields, cleared lanes for the troops into the wide world beyond.

Swaying here and there on the hilltop were fluffy white bunches of feather grass, that singing grass of the steppes that hums delicately in the slightest breeze. From what steppe, by what wind, had its seeds been brought there and sown on this hillside—by what miracle had it escaped the

fire and raining metal of these past few days? Here and there by the shell holes there were grizzly patches of wormwood or clumps of sweet-smelling thyme; and Gai, stooping under his heavy burden, would yet bend down to pluck a fragrant handful. Holding up his face to the sun, he would drink in the scent and look about him, friendlier than ever, smiling at the world at large.

"It smells right," he would say, "that's our kind of grass... Smells just like back home."

He had an extraordinary love for plants and scents, this young boy from the Polessye.

"You ought to make a wreath of these flowers, like a girl," the men laughed.

"I would if there was time," Gai answered, blushing. "I can, you know."

Everybody was looking for something, as if there were jewels scattered here. They picked up with interest anything that happened to catch their eye, twisted it about, then tossed it away and looked for something again—until suddenly there was a thundering explosion, and the clear morning clouded over all at once: Gai had trodden on a mine.

Only a moment before, Chernysh had seen him. He was standing over some blue cornflowers, smiling gently at them. He bent down, plucked a flower lovingly, took one step—and then the earth gave a roar and everything vanished in black smoke. A black column of it went up where Gai had stood; and when it cleared, there was nothing there, as if the boy had caught fire and burnt up instantly.

They took off the smoke-blackened footplate that pinned him to the ground. Freed from the bloodstained canvas straps, his body seemed to heave a sigh, then sagged nervelessly to the ground. Gai lay stretched out full length, and only now did they notice how well-made he was, slender yet broad of shoulder, a comely lad. His fair silky eyebrows lay on his face like two strands of feather grass, that boisterous winds had brought here from the eastern steppes. He gazed up at the clear sky, with a trusting and slightly surprised air and his eyes were bluer than the sky itself, the intense transparent blue of sapphire. And gripped still, amazingly, in his dead fingers were the blue cornflowers, withered by the blast. So they buried him, with these wild flowers that had reminded him of home.

With much difficulty, they pieced together his tattered papers. In the same pocket was a handful of tommy-gun cartridges. Makoveichik scooped them out and poured them into his own pocket. He did not know that he was already their third owner.

Gai's death left them heavy of heart—the more so, perhaps, because he had not been killed yesterday, in the heat of the fighting, but on this quiet morning, when everything around was so serene and the boundless plain breathed the profusion of the south.

The men trudged, grim and silent, glancing askance at the strange unfamiliar country below and the distant white towns, where they had not yet been, but were determined to be.

"We'll catch you there too," Khayetsky swore, rolling the whites of his eyes. "And we won't forget anything. Not one thing!"

Before long they overtook the rest of the battalion. It had not yet descended, though the scouts reported that there were no signs of the enemy either in the nearest town or beyond. The troops were being fed. For the first time in three days they were eating properly, sitting on the green slope that only yesterday had been the enemy rear. They ate unhurriedly, and as the sun warmed them, they smiled as if they hadn't seen it for a long time.

Chernysh sat away from the rest, his chin in his hands. Gai's death had stunned him.

He thought of the night when Gai, risking his life, had gone instead of himself to find Buzko and Vakulenko among the corpses... And of this morning, and the boy lying mangled in the grass with cornflowers in his hands... It hurt past enduring.

In these few days of the assault Chernysh had got noticeably thinner, his brown boyish face was leaner, the high colour in his cheeks had darkened like an oak leaf in autumn.

The sun was already well up in the sky; and on the plain below, a little town lay before them, bathed in its rays. Chernysh had seen this town plenty of times on Bryansky's topographical map. There it had been nothing but a lot of black rectangles—while when you actually saw it, what a pretty place it was! The wide streets running down to the dazzling sunlit river, the metal roofs sparkling among the foliage, and the walls white as cinema screens. But Chernysh knew there was nothing here but these bare walls and battered roofs.

Absorbed in his own thoughts, he did not notice Roman Blazhenko come up behind him. Roman stopped and looked down silently for a while at the little town.

"I wouldn't kill them," he said suddenly, and Chernysh, startled, looked round with dry, inflamed eyes.

"Wouldn't kill who?"

"All these Hitlers and Antonescus,[3] these ministers that

can't be happy without war... Killing's too good for them. I'd put them in chains and take them around for people to look at... No, let the little homeless kiddies take them around, the orphans that they've left everywhere. I'd have these little ones take them through every land, over every road.... And give them neither bread nor water... Let them eat the cinders of our homes... Let them gnaw at those sooty bricks... I'd burn them slow day after day, with the fire and metal they brought down on us. Give them such a taste of war that no one will ever want it again!..."

"We'll do that all right... Stamp it out... Like a plague!" Chernysh confirmed.

Blazhenko asked leave and sat down on the grass beside him. Looking down again and narrowing his eyes, so that his lined face looked older, he went on reproachfully:

"And even that isn't enough!... Here was Gai... Such a good lad... Young, and nice, and anxious to do right... Did he live out his life? Didn't he want to see the sun any more? And look ... what they did to him." And Roman gave a deep sigh.

Then he happened to look up at Chernysh and was horrified: the lieutenant was crying. He cried without knowing it, his eyes fixed on the empty green town with its white houses. If anyone had asked why he was crying, he couldn't have told them. There are these moments of pity for everything in the world. He thought of what Gai had said, "You feel sort of ... kindly towards everybody!"

Those were his first and last tears in the war. Recalling them later sometimes, Chernysh was ashamed of his softness; he did not know that this was the voice of his still uncalloused heart.

The order came to move on. The infantry companies were up in front, in close formation: then the battalion staff, then the mortars. On the way down, Bryansky and Sagaida argued about something, sliding over the lush grass. Bryansky's green canvas boots were completely faded now.

"They've forgotten everything already; Gai too..." Chernysh thought; but he didn't blame them.

On the march a few days afterwards, when he had grown more intimate with Bryansky, he reminded him of this episode. Bryansky made no reply for a few moments.

"You know, Chernysh," he said finally, "you know ... I've seen things during this war that I imagine most people haven't seen; I've come to realise things that most people probably haven't realised either. And it's made me ... if not wiser... at least different from what I was..."

1946

LEONID SOBOLEV

In Bucharest

(Abridged)

As it happened, we entered Bucharest late at night.

The moon, almost full, hung high over the city. It was completely deserted and still, there was not a sound to be heard. We passed little single-storey buildings in the suburbs, the larger the signboards affixed to them, the smaller the little shops underneath; broad avenues in the centre with huge silent stone buildings, palaces, ministries, and embassies with flags hanging; churches large and small, rising over little houses on the outskirts and hiding in the cracks between the temples of commerce on the main streets; dark tree-lined avenues and dense clumps of gardens, beyond the wrought-iron railings of which could be seen the white private houses of the rich, flaunting vain and expensive architectural fantasies at each other; countless squares, spacious and tiny, with countless militant or sentimental monuments in them: kings in full dress uniform on horses with necks arched high, soldiers in battle dress with grenades and rifles, statesmen in jackets, angels with broad crenellated wings...

This foreign city in a foreign country was beautiful, but in the pale light of the high moon it reminded one astonishingly of a theatre that has been deserted for the night, the performance over, the audience gone home and the set left on stage lit by the faint beam of a far-away night worker's lamp.

The auditorium, which not long ago rang with emotional words, fanfares of victory and the applause of an audience delighted by the brillance and splendour of the performance lies quiet and empty. Sober real life has entered the kingdom of props and acting and slow, calm steps are the only sound coming from the empty stage: it is the night watch, doing the rounds of the empty theatre, carefully checking to see if any of the actors has left a cigarette butt behind. The steps

Leonid Sobolev (1898-1971)—Soviet prose writer, State Prize winner (1943), which the writer transferred to the Defence Fund. A Navy officer, Sobolev fought at the front from the first days of the war, and took part in the liberation of Novorossiisk, Odessa, Sevastopol, Bucharest and the capture of Berlin.

Sobolev is the author of the novel *The Big Refit* (1932-1962), a book of stories entitled *The Spirit of the Sea* (1942), a book of sketches entitled *The Paths of Victory* (1945), and other works devoted mainly to the theme of the Navy and Soviet sailors.

The sketch "In Bucharest" was first published in *Pravda* in September 1944.

When liberating Romania between March and September 1944, Soviet troops lost 69,000 officers and men killed and more than 217,000 wounded.

draw closer to us and we see the Red Army patrol, the only real people in this ghostly city of moon-lit scenery.

A bloody melodrama has been performed, written by a bad playwright by the name of Adolf Hitler and staged in Romania by the similarly talentless director Ion Antonescu. Everything in it that seemed to be real—victories, conquests, riches, glory—all this disappeared in the last act. The imaginary "Transnistrul" again became greater Odessa in the Soviet Union, the Crimea returned to being inaccessibly separated from Romania by the Black Sea, and the only thing that was new was that in the depths of the sea, the steppes of greater Odessa and the mountains of the Crimea lay the bones of those to whom the authors of the production had assigned the least advantageous roles. The Romanian people had paid for this performance in millions of lives. The wistful Romania of fields and villages, awash with the tears of widows and mothers, looks on at Bucharest, and an unanswered question hangs over the country: why did all this have to happen?.. Why?

Terrible is the fate of a people who have allowed a small group of criminals to decide its fate.

It is amazing how many concepts, transformed into flesh and blood, have new light thrown on them, acquire a new force and a powerful new truth, here, in a foreign country. We are used to talking about the moral and political unity of the Soviet people. We are so accustomed to this incontrovertible standpoint, that all its triumphant meaning, all its greatness, is already natural for us, as natural and imperceptible for someone as breathing. Here, in a country which was knocked out of the saddle by our military and political might, these words can be understood anew in their full, great meaning.

We have an enormous war behind us, hard years of privation, sacrifices, tragedies and losses. We remember the autumn of 1941 in Moscow, we remember Odessa and Sevastopol, Leningrad and Novorossiisk, Stalingrad and Voronezh. There were days of immense hardship, which it seemed the people would not be able to endure. But never once in all the years of the war did the confidence that we would win the war, no matter what happened, waver in the heart of the Soviet person...

The Nazis said at the beginning of the war that the Soviet Union, with its vast expanses of space, enormous stocks of raw materials and incalculable human reserves, could withstand their onslaught if it was inhabited by one people. But, they said, the Soviet Union is a "geographical concept", an artificial combination of different ethnic groups, a focus of

intersecting interests. As soon as discord is caused among these numerous ethnic groups, the gigantic country would collapse.

And the Nazis tried to set the Ukrainians against the Russians, the Byelorussians against the Ukrainians, the Estonians against the Russians... It turned out to be the silliest dream on their part. All Soviet peoples rose as a single wall to defend their common native land—and Kazakhs died for Moscow, Georgians for Sevastopol, Ukrainians for Leningrad, Russians for the Caucasus, Azerbaijanians for the Volga.

The unity of our peoples, the unity of their aspirations, expectations, convictions, and hopes—this is what saved our native land in the heavy ordeals of this unprecedented war, this is what brought it to victory.

Here, however, everything was different: there was one people, but they were led by political adventurers, criminal accomplices of Hitler's clique, every one of whom thought about whatever he liked, but the good of the people and their country. Five years ago they had surrendered the Romanian people, deprived of their unity, to the mercy of fascism. Romania had become Hitler's submissive and obsequious satellite.

Of course there were also genuine patriots in Romania. But they drowned in the general mass—confused, separated and lacking in unity, aspirations, expectations, convictions, and hopes. A Kazakh proverb tells us: "If you have lost your way in the steppe—go with the people; the sea will not dry up, the people will not get lost." Here everything was in disarray, everyone tugged towards himself, each person sought his own pocket of hope in the revolving millstones of history.

Officers, teachers, doctors and journalists who conversed with us tried to convince us that resisting Hitler in 1939, when Romania's fate was decided, was useless.

One soldier resisting a tank also seems useless. But sailors near Sevastopol went one after the other into single combat with tanks; covered with grenades they threw themselves under them. What counts is not the strength of the enemy, but the strength of one's own courage, the strength of one's personal loyalty to one's people, to one's native land. As a matter of fact, such people were found in Nazi-occupied France, in little Bohemia, in Poland and Denmark, who stood up for their people, for the honour and happiness of their countries. Moreover, the heroic patriots of Yugoslavia managed to make the powerful Nazi war machine, then still at full strength, grind to a standstill for three long years.

More terrible than anything for a person is making a bargain with his conscience. The person, who for an instant gets the sudden, convenient or malicious idea: "Maybe the enemy won't do anything to me? Maybe I could live my small life out with him too?", that person has already given away his soul, his will, his honour. I listened to several officers trying to persuade me that 1939 was the hardest year for them, that Hitler's yoke was shameful and disgraceful, that all they did was dream of the time when they would manage to throw it off and live as their honour and conscience demanded. A question which there was no point in asking was ready to escape my lips: why then did you not try to throw off this hated yoke, why then did you go so willingly where Hitler ordered you? I did not ask this question; I knew what the troops of Marshal Antonescu in Odessa and the Crimea were like, and I knew that the dream of a "Great Romania" from the Volga to the Caucasus was incompatible with thoughts of resistance.

This illusion of greatness and glory, an insane dream, incomprehensible and foreign to the Romanian people, lured Romanian entrepreneurs and profiteers, and the Romanian military clique fostered by Antonescu, most of whom now rest in Russian land and at the bottom of the Black Sea. In stretching a hand out to Hitler they staked everything, forgetting that discord between the people and those who try to lead them leads to disaster and ruin, and failing to understand that victory is won by the people, not by a handful of adventurers.

At the beginning of the war, in besieged Odessa, I happened to talk to captive Romanian officers who were lucky enough to have remained alive in the gigantic mincing-machine. And only one had something quite intelligent to say to us about the war. He was an elderly lieutenant, a reserve officer and grammar school history teacher. I asked him if he, a university graduate who had studied and knew the hard lessons of history, seriously thought that Antonescu's Russian campaign was realistic. He wearily shook his head.

"Ask Antonescu and his officers this. For them the history of Romania begins with Hitler..."

"And will end with him too?"

"Probably..."

"Together with the history of Romania?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, that depends on you Russians... If you continue to wipe them out like you are doing here, then there will be no one to drag Romania into the abyss. And maybe Romania will manage to remain Romania..."

At the end of the war, three years later, this conversation was nearly repeated. This time I was near Bucharest rather than Odessa, talking not to a semi-civilian reserve lieutenant but to a regular Colonel M., who had fought against Kaiser Wilhelm's forces in the First World War. He had spent the Second World War guarding depots of some kind in the little town where we stayed overnight on our way to Bucharest, and his sole battle had taken place five days ago when the regiment he commanded stopped and disarmed a passing Nazi unit. Now he was getting his regiment ready for the campaign into Transylvania.

"You can smile," he said, grinning, "but it turned out that you Russians saved Romania. Here, within the country, we couldn't get the better of Antonescu's Nazi band ourselves..."

He suddenly stopped short and frowned.

"But this is only words to you, the flattery of the defeated... You're not obliged to believe them... If you happen to be at the front in Transylvania, ask the Russian general how Colonel M. and his regiment beat the Germans."

Colonel M. was right: we believe in deeds, not words.

In the morning we walked around the city. In bright sunlight it now had a completely different look to it. A hubbub of life filled the streets: policemen spectacularly decorated with braid, stripes and aiguillettes; a rumbling tram with two classes—the first car for ladies and gentlemen, the second for "the common people"; cars rushing by on a street road scorched by the sun but for some reason unflushed; loud posters and effective shop windows with multicoloured ersatzes; expensive private houses, their windows mysteriously shielded by trellised shutters—concealing within a closed life, surrounded by tasteless luxury and hostile towards us; a swarm of hawkers, making an unbearable racket, blocking up the streets with their trays of trifles; elegantly dressed people sitting in pavement cafes and on cushions in strange, tall horse-drawn cabs; business people and other smart operators, looking at us fearfully from time to time...

More simply dressed people crowded round each of our cars, round each one of our soldiers or officers asking us questions, smiling, wanting to help us find our way. A demonstration with Soviet and Romanian flags moved up the street...

On Bratianu Street, the main artery of the city, an enormous crowd was milling around dusty military cars. Romanian officers and soldiers were seated in them armed

and with helmets on, and they had Romanian flags on car radiators. Leading the column was a Russian captain with military decorations.

This was a new military unit, formed out of Romanians recently taken prisoner and on its way to the front against Hitler. The people of Bucharest were looking at them, gasping with surprise. An old man turned to us with a spontaneity that was purely southern:

"Just to think of it, they tried to convince us that the Russians cut off the nose and ears of all the Romanians taken prisoner... But these lads are all in one piece. They've even eaten well there with you, in captivity..."

The bane of fascism still clouded the consciousness of many Romanians. In a small town near Bucharest the wife of an agronomist told us that in the first few days even educated people were afraid to go out into the street, that they trembled at home, in anticipation of the "Russian beasts". In Bucharest itself a cultured woman with a command of foreign languages and a correspondent on a major Romanian newspaper, questioned us about the position of women in the Soviet Union: was it true that we don't know what a family is? That all women are obliged to wear the same style of dress? That soon after birth children are taken away to children's homes?

It may be possible to understand the illiterate peasant woman in a little village near Buzeu who spent a long time looking with suppressed fear at one of our soldiers that had gone into her peasant house for water, and who finally suddenly got up the determination to go up to him and run her palm over his hair in search of the horns which, she had been convinced, all Bolsheviks were provided with, but it was simply absurd to listen to questions of this kind from a journalist.

In a Bucharest crowded street you would come across a huge number of men of call-up age. In the villages hardly any men were to be seen: just women, children and old men. We found the reason why in one particular village where we stopped to mend a punctured tyre. Standing there was a beautiful, new, well-built house. It turned out that in 1941 its owner had come back on leave from the front at Odessa, bringing with him four trunks of gold and silver items, cotton textiles, watches and other "spoils of war". Part of this, to the sum of two hundred thousand lei, went to bribe the local official concerned to get him off military service, and on the rest he built this pretty little house, quickly and happily bringing his own war to a close. How many more "knights" of this kind returned to Bucharest from a suc-

cessful campaign with Marshal Antonescu's army, bearing trunks of belongings plundered in Odessa, the Crimea and the Caucasus?

The big and small proprietors' well-being was boosted by the opportunity to use the labour of prisoners-of-war for nothing. In the village of Ţanderei we were quartered overnight in the house of a landowner by the name of Ieremia. He himself and his family were not there—they had left as our troops drew near. This fanciful and comfortable house, or more accurately, expensive villa with bathroom, parquet floors, tiled stoves, verandas and good furniture, came to the esteemed Ieremia for nothing: for two years a hundred Soviet prisoners-of-war had worked in his fields and tended his cattle. During this time they had amassed so much wealth for him that he was able to obtain both building materials and furniture, and in the spring of this year those very same forced labourers built him this handsome house.

A lump sticks in one's throat as one thinks of the terrible price all this cost in Russia's grief, Leningrad's hunger and the Ukraine's destruction...

Yes, in Bucharest you could lead a carefree life. Everything flowed here, into the capital, towards the money. Nothing at all turned up in the villages. We saw ragged women there, a rotten shirt barely covering their breasts, painfully thin children with matchstick legs, and only a pot of polenta on the table. Here in the city, however, life was merry—the war did not come to stay overnight.

On the road from Constanţa all the Romanian officers we met warned us that we would not see Bucharest proper.

"Just think, first it was bombed by Anglo-American airplanes, then by German ones... It's something terrible... So much destruction, the whole city in ruins, that's all you'll see..."

Remembering this, I looked for the destruction in Bucharest. And indeed—one section of its houses had disintegrated. In the centre the theatre, the royal city palace and several buildings on Victoria Street were damaged, and there were areas of destruction in several other districts. But that, strictly, is all.

And overshadowing Bratianu Street, safe, sound and beautiful, lined with tall buildings—their walls completely unmarked by smoke from fires, not a single pane of glass knocked out by an explosion—a tragic sight rose before my eyes, the main street of another capital, the Kreshchatik.

About two months ago I had walked along this now non-existent street, at one time the finest of Kiev, the beautiful

capital of the Ukraine. Liberated some time back by our troops, it lived a full and peaceful life, forgetting the bombs, fires and street battles. But in its centre stood the destroyed Kreshchatik, a monument of denunciation, an indictment, a call to avenge fascists. Work to restore it was already in progress, once a week every citizen of Kiev gave up a day to work on dismantling the ruins. They were neatly swept up, formless heaps of stones were tidied away, and bare walls rose up over the pavements in a deathly cleanliness.

I remember the huge sites after a fire in Novorossiisk and Kursk, the wounds of Odessa and the ruins of Sevastopol. But here the sight of the neatly tidied ruins of an enormous street, vanishing into the distance, was more terrible than anything I knew. What was most terrible was that the life of the large city was in full swing, that the war had already moved away from here and everything seemed like a bad dream, while the Kreshchatik, the jewel and pride of the Ukrainian capital, lay before us lifeless, motionless, empty, unable to hear life stirring around it, not knowing that victory had come to its city.

It reminded me of a large and noisy house, full of life; every floor ringing with the sound of children's laughter, the patter of swift little feet, music and songs, while a beloved one lies dead on a table in a quiet room somewhere. He is neatly washed and dressed in his best, his dead hair lovingly smoothed and his eyes closed, their lustre gone, and people entering the room lower their voices and tread quietly. We walked the same way along the Kreshchatik, speaking in an undertone and walking carefully on the swept pavement. As we took in the gigantic vista of splendid ruined buildings, terraces of devastation towering up with collapsed walls, we took off our caps before this image of national sorrow.

We will not talk now of who suffered or lost most.

It is striking how pure and noble is the Russian soldier's heart. Worn out with suffering the length of the war, tormented by memories of fallen friends and brothers and by the sight of villages and towns destroyed by the enemy, it is filled with anger, but not petty revenge.

Any other people, falling on the capital of a country, which had brought it so much grief and misfortune, would have meted out cruel and terrible treatment. The Russian soldier went in with a fine vision of courage, integrity and nobility...

And perhaps it was precisely the Russian soldier's calmness, full of hidden strength, that most struck the inhabitants of Bucharest, anxiously awaiting the entry of "the Russian beasts" into the capital.

That very same Colonel M., the commander of a Romanian regiment we spoke to, suggested this thought to me in a small town near Bucharest.

"I don't know how your soldiers behave in battle," he said to me. "But I see how they behave here, in a country which to all intents and purposes was conquered by them. I've seen the Germans and Italians here. They behaved insolently, but I, an old officer, understood perfectly well that their insolence stemmed from cowardice. Your soldiers behave like calm masters... Look at them—it's as if for them nothing has happened. Probably they are terrible in battle; I am glad that I did not have to clash with them there..."

The inhabitants of Bucharest expected robberies and violence, murders and wild outbursts, all that they connected with the idea of "taking a town". None of this happened. An army came, unseen by them before, an army of warriors, not murderers, of soldiers, not marauders. And those who thought it would be the same as it was when they themselves had captured towns, and who decided to improve their affairs in the general hubbub, only gave themselves away.

Towards evening on the 3rd September, Major Ainutdinov, deputy commander of the regiment guarding the city, travelled by willys along a street far from the centre. A window pane on the second floor of a house shattered and a woman leant out and started to shout. The major stopped the car, Romanians came running and translated for him: "Save me, Russian soldiers are robbing my flat."

The major, his submachine-gunner and driver threw themselves inside. There were seven people in Russian uniform—one in captain's shoulder-straps, with a Guard's badge on his breast, a second with lance-corporal's stripes, the rest in privates' shoulder-straps—they were tying up bundles. Broken crockery and spoons were scattered over the room, the woman's dress was torn to pieces. The bandits were seized. Only the "captain" and the "lance-corporal" spoke Russian. They turned out to be Romanian legionaries in the fascist Iron Guard organisation. The other five were Germans.

I found out about a second incident in the Soviet commandant's office. At dawn someone wearing our uniform with lieutenant's shoulder-straps tried to take a watch from a woman walking along a narrow street near Elizabet Street. She called out. Our patrol appeared in time, and the "lieutenant" turned out to be a Romanian deserter. The officer's field shirt he was wearing was stained with blood...

Bandits, Germans in hiding, Romanian deserters and what was left of the Iron Guard tried here and there to discredit

the Red Army in the first few days. But only four days after the entry of our troops the Romanian commandant of the city of Bucharest came to the Soviet commandant to officially thank him for restoring order in the city.

Before my departure I went to say goodbye to the regiment that had guarded the city and where I had made friends. The major was not there. Waiting for him to arrive, I talked to a Russian soldier sweeping the yard of the barracks. Getting on in years, pock-marked, and wearing a soldier's field shirt burned white by the sun on long marches and washed clean by crossing water many times, he efficiently manoeuvred an unusual broom—a besom made of reeds, pinned on a thin stick. It turned out that he had gone all the way from Kaliningrad, engaged in battle, and was himself from the Ukraine, from near Kirovograd. I asked the usual questions: how was his family, where were they, did they write?

"Of course they write... Only the letters don't reach me—look where we've got to. I wrote them a note myself yesterday: we're in capital number one, I wrote, which is called Bucharest, and probably we'll soon head off again. And when I write to you from the last capital, called Berlin, then you can reckon that the war is over and I'll soon be back..."

And he smiled broadly and merrily and began once more to clean the dusty barrack yard in the centre of "capital number one".

September 1944

VLADIMIR RUDNY

They Made It!

In Bucharest the war correspondents and cameramen settled into the Ambassador Hotel—with baths, hot water, lifts and telephones. It was the first such city along the roads of war: it had not been destroyed, shops were open, restaurants were working even after midnight, the streets were lit at night, newspaper sellers ran about early in the morning, yelling out the stunning news from the latest papers, while picturesquely dressed guards paraded up and down at the royal palace...

On the 10th of September 1944 we learnt that there had been a revolution in Bulgaria: the tsar, regents and ministers who had collaborated with the Nazis were overthrown by the Patriotic Front, as the coalition of different parties headed by the Workers' Party of Bulgaria was called. We were assigned a heavy lorry by the headquarters of the Second Ukrainian Front. Eighteen correspondents and cameramen seated themselves inside and set off for the frontier between Romania and Bulgaria. No one yet knew if our troops were in that area. The group was headed by Vadim Kozhevnikov, a *Pravda* special correspondent.

Late in the evening we arrived at the Romanian frontier town of Giurgiu. The little town was asleep. Our headlights picked out huge, blatant signs from out of the gloom of its narrow streets. At the crossroads we lit up a young woman in a beret assigned to control the traffic, one of a kind you could find all over the roads of the Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldavia.

"Hello, friend from home!" the driver hailed her. "Which way to Bulgaria?"

"Right," answered the girl in a business-like manner, and she held out her little flag to the right in so relaxed and spontaneous a way as if she had spent her whole life directing people from one country to another.

Vladimir Rudny (1913-1984)—Soviet prose writer. During World War II he served in the Navy and fought in numerous battles. At the end of the war he was a war correspondent. His novels *In the Secret Trench* (1942), *Bold Reconnaissance* (1949), *In Active Navy* (1965), *The Island of Salvation* (1968), and others are based on material collected during the war.

"A Nastya from Ryazan on the Danube," said the driver, bursting out laughing. "Just like home. I dare say the entire police force kow-tows to her. See what times we live in!.."

Straying in search of a means to cross from the rubbish-strewn quay of the Romanian harbour, we came across a two-storey building with a balcony overlooking the river. A little red light over the balcony showed that someone was in. Cautiously we went upstairs. A torch suddenly shone in our faces.

"We're old acquaintances, Comrade Captain!" The man holding the torch spoke in Russian. "Do you remember Lieutenant Stetsenko?.."

I remembered the young man, the commander of a battery in the Danube Flotilla, a heavy battery for such a young man. It certainly weighed them down when they had to retreat—from Izmail to Odessa and from Odessa to Tuapse. I met Stetsenko near Akkerman on the Dniester in June of 1944. He said to me then: "The devil take it, big guns have got so much lighter, haven't they? We're jumping like a landing force from port to port. What chance do you reckon they'll set up our big-calibre gun permanently in the Tsargrad arm of the river?"

"So they didn't let you stay put, you're off to Izmail now?"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Stetsenko. "Izmail is below. I'm in an international position: one gun is in Romania, the other in Bulgaria."

"Which do you like best?"

"My native Ukraine." Stetsenko burst out laughing as he slipped into his native Ukrainian. "But they say the Danube is navigable up to Vienna, and even further upstream..."

He took us to the shore from where we were to be ferried across. An old Romanian tug-boat pulled the ferry to the other side of the Danube. The Romanian bank disappeared in the haze. The lights of Ruse—Ruschuk twinkled on the Bulgarian side.

A joint Soviet-Bulgarian command was in its second day of operation. Besides there were officials in old Russian uniforms and even former Russian policemen. It was hard to make out who had collaborated with the Germans and who had been neutral. But they were already being pushed aside by the masses—ordinary Bulgarians, partisans coming down from the mountains, peasants, workers and soldiers with the two letters P. F., standing for Patriotic Front, on their armbands. In the morning a crowd gathered at the house where we had spent the night. We were showered with leaflets of the Bulgarian Workers' Party. I put one away as a keepsake. It read:

"Red Army Comrades!
For the second time in the history of the Bulgarian people[1]
we greet you as liberators, as our fathers did before us.
Welcome!
Greetings, comrades!"

That was the beginning. Major Yakov Yankovsky, our Commandant in Ruschuk, could not tell us what was happening on the road to Sofia—there were no Soviet troops ahead of us. We hesitated. It was wartime after all, an unfamiliar country where the Nazis had been throwing their weight around for several years. But we were under orders from the Front Political Administration to go to Sofia. The Commandant's office assigned us several motor cars.

To be honest, I felt like I was winning a race I hadn't run, like in Ilf and Petrov[2]. It was like reaping laurels meant for others. From the 9th of September on, crowds of Bulgarians lined the streets day and night, around arches entwined with flowers, waiting for the Red Army. No one wanted to listen that we were only correspondents—we were wearing Soviet military uniform, and we received an ardent welcome. They would drag us out of our cars, bore us aloft, threw us in the air, embraced us, kissed us, lifted us onto make-shift platforms and demanded that we say just a few words in Russian. "We'll understand," they would chorus in Bulgarian, when one of us mumbled about not being able to speak their language. Indeed, we understood each other perfectly, not just because our languages have roots in common but also because a genuine people's revolution had taken place here. "They made it!" and "Death to fascism!"—most likely these two phrases, which we heard and read thousands of times, will be remembered all our lives long.

On September 12 a collective photograph of us and a report that the first Soviet officers had arrived in Sofia appeared in all the newspapers of the Bulgarian capital. We were taken aback: wouldn't opponents in the Western press use this report, wouldn't they interpret it as army interference into the Bulgarian revolution?! Vadim Kozhevnikov gathered us together and we agreed to stick together, not to name our newspapers for the meanwhile, and generally to "keep our heads down". But what could be done if the Bulgarians, so carried away with the joy of what was happening, did not take these subtleties of diplomacy and our fears into account. They were simply extending a heartfelt welcome to the Soviet military.

We stood in a small herd in the square of the royal palace, around gigantic Tiger tank seized by the insurgents looking at the excited crowd eagerly but in some confusion, the

young people in their red armbands scurrying in the massive doorway of some ministry, probably the war ministry. We had been preparing for a reception that was in store for us, and were proud and trembling—the first reception given for Soviet people by the War Minister of the new, revolutionary power was no laughing matter. The door which we had been watching flew open. My colleagues nudged me as a Soviet sailor came out into the square. He was wearing a peakless cap and a pea-jacket, under which, of course, you could see just the very edge of a striped vest. Only the trousers he was wearing were not Soviet, they were made of grey cloth and were tucked into foppish boots. I went up to him quickly. He did not let me utter a word but hugged and kissed me, then straightened up and announced that he was a soldier of the 384th Separate Battalion of the Marines under Major Fyodor Yevgenievich Kotanov, and that after recovery he was following from hospital to the Bulgarian port of Varna, where, according to his information, his battalion was to disembark. He had just been at a reception given by the War Minister—he had got there before us. The latter had made him a present of these brand-new trousers and boots, and he had not dared to refuse out of respect for the revolution. From hospital he came to Constanţa and learnt there that the battalion had gone to sea, to land in enemy territory. He got on a train—the trains were running regularly. Bulgarian railway workers "captured" him and brought him to Sofia, as the first Soviet soldier on the territory of the revolutionary country that had thrown off the invaders. Needless to say, he was now intending to head for his place of service...

I passed through the whole of Bulgaria—from Ruschuk to Sofia, from Sofia to Kazanlyk and Burgas, from Burgas to Varna and Dobrudja. Sometimes our route lay through villages that the Red Army had not yet got to, but everywhere they waited for it to arrive, and did not tire of waiting. There were Soviet and Bulgarian flags next to each other at every crossroads, on every house, literally on every roadside tree; for weeks crowds of people kept watch on village outskirts in the hope of meeting representatives of their closely related "liberator-country", as they called the Soviet Union everywhere.

In the town of Tyrnov the owner of one shop hung a two-year-old copy of *Izvestia* up in his window—this made his shop most popular, the more so as he had taken a risk in keeping it during the years of occupation.

In the town of Karlov, in the Valley of Roses, an old man came up to me during lunch at a roadside cafe, embraced

me, emptied a scent-bottle of attar of roses on to my jacket, kissed me and went away quickly without saying a word. Ivan Anastasov Tutev, a young man in the town of Pirdop and previously a sailor in the Bulgarian fleet, gave me his photograph as a keepsake. He had spent fourteen months in prison, sentenced to 15 years hard labour for a little Russian volume of Pushkin, found under his pillow in his crew's quarters. In the partisan detachments there were peasants, teachers, doctors and traders ruined by the Nazis, and soldiers who had not wanted to take part in the campaign against the Greek and Yugoslav peoples.

In Sofia I was told about the national hero Slavcho—a teacher and student of law. Two years before he had set up a partisan detachment which grew into a brigade, operating in Western Bulgaria. Then he added a battalion of soldiers that had been sent to fight Tito's forces in Yugoslavia by the government of Filov and Bozhilov's followers: the commander of the battalion, Dicha Petrov, led his soldiers away from the front, wiping out the invaders en route, and fought his way through to Greece and Macedonia to fight the Nazis in his native country. I talked to the Bulgarian poet and journalist Veselin Georgiev, a staunch young man well-known among the partisans by the name of Andro. It was he and his comrades who caught Bogdan Filov, the local Quisling. Georgiev described how his detachment came into existence. Five of them got together with one 6.5-calibre pistol and two cartridges. No one knew if the pistol worked—they could not spare the cartridges to try it out. They attacked a police station, got hold of five submachine-guns and then decided to try the pistol: it did not work. This was how one of the largest partisan detachments in the region of Sofia came into being...

...A bay sprang up in the shroud of black mist. Its cliffs extended far into the sea. In a hollow on the shore lay the port town of Burgas. The captured tugs and motor boats that had helped Kotanov's battalion land here were in the dock.

An elderly Bulgarian came running up to one sailor and hugged him:

"They made it! Greetings, brother, from the Link Party!" "What kind of party is that?" asked the sailor, pricking up his ears. "For Hitler or against?" On hearing the answer, to the approval of those standing around, he said: "Well, if you're against, let's kiss each other. Then it's a coalition!"

Major Kotanov, standing next to me, was looking askance.

"He's a diplomat," he said. "I don't have a landing battalion now, but a diplomatic corps. The boys understand that you need both vigilance and tact when you're abroad."

KONSTANTIN SIMONOV

Night over Belgrade

Before the war Dusya Zhelyabova had worked as a lighting technician at a film studio. She was responsible for the arc-lamp, moving its dazzling light now on to the film-studio floor, now on to the scenery, now on to the actors in their make-up, as instructed by the person operating the camera.

Dusya had worked there for about eight years. Many famous scenes had been shot under her five-hundred-watt light: Lyubov Orlova clutching a black child to her breast as she ran after the train; Cherkasov leading the Russian regiments against the Livonians, wielding an enormous sword; Shchukin—so alike Lenin in his make-up that people started if they met him unexpectedly in a corridor—making a speech from a rostrum that had been constructed in the studio.

Dusya knew the names and faces of all the film actors and actresses and kept stills from all the films in which she had worked the arc-light.

Then the war started. The film studio was evacuated. Along with the cumbersome lighting equipment belonging to her section, Dusya travelled for days in a heated goods van, going further and further into the rear, to Central Asia. There, in a large Central Asian town, the heated goods van stopped to go no further.

The film studio was housed temporarily in one of the narrow little streets of the town, in little rooms never intended for the shooting of films.

It was a difficult time. A constant stream of depressing news came from the fronts. Light was provided for only a few hours each night, and then with gaps, because the electricity was needed by the munitions factories that had been evacuated to the area. They didn't shoot full-length films, just made compilations on war themes by putting several short ones together.

Konstantin Simonov (1915-1979)—Soviet poet, prose writer, playwright and journalist, Lenin and State Prizes winner. As a young war correspondent for the newspaper *Red Star*, Simonov travelled the long road from Moscow to Berlin, passing through Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Poland.

Though Simonov writes in various genres, his work centres on the theme of the contemporary world and characters who display courage and a sense of duty. He is the author of poems, anthologies of personal and civic lyrical verse (*With You and Without You*, 1942; *Friends and Foes*, 1948, and others), plays (*The Lad from Our Town*, 1941; *The Russian People*, 1942, and others), stories ("*Days and Nights*", 1944; "*From Lopatin's Notes*", 1965, and others), the trilogy *The Living and the Dead* (1959-1971), diaries of the war years entitled *Different Days of War* (1977-1979), film scripts, journalistic articles and literary criticism.

The short story "Night over Belgrade", written as a correspondence from the front, was first published in December 1944, in *Pravda*.

Barely no one at this time knew how to film the war clearly, but that was exactly what everyone wanted to do, and a lot of shooting, running about and people dying featured in every short film.

There were no tanks in the town to film—they had gone to the front, there were no airplanes—they had gone too; there were no German helmets, uniform or weapons because very few Germans had yet been taken prisoner. Finally there was no haloxylon to heat the film studio, and the actors, free from filming, would gather round Dusya's five-hundred-watt lamp for the little bit of warmth it gave their frozen hands.

Nearly all the men in the lighting section had gone to the front. Each morning Dusya would come to her hostel in the wooden barracks, lie straight down on her trestle-bed in her quilted jacket, boots and trousers, close her eyes and think agonising thoughts.

It seemed to her, especially at this time of bad news, that everything she and others were doing here was completely unnecessary, and that the only real point was in being at the front, where most of her friends in the section had already departed.

One spring day in 1942 she went to the military registration and enlistment office and signed up as a volunteer for the front.

When she came to the film studio to say good-bye, the film director she had lately been working with, a loud, quarrelsome man who had lost half his once bulky form, looked at her sadly, saying:

"What a pity, what a pity."

But he did not object. He looked at her once more and said:

"I applied to go to the front too, but they wouldn't let me go. They said it was more useful that I do this." He motioned at the scenery in a corner of the film studio, the doorway to some house with a sign on it in foreign letters: the studio was making a film about the underground struggle against the Germans in the occupied countries of Western Europe.

Shooting this film had seemed particularly unnecessary to Dusya, in the mood she was in.

"What is Western Europe to us," she thought, "when the Germans have taken Kharkov."

And looking with pity at the director for the last time, she gave him her hand and said good-bye.

A dark, quiet night hung over Belgrade. The last Germans, ensconced in attics, had been killed that morning. The

fighting had moved beyond the Danube and the Sava and an unprecedented silence pervaded the city, deafened by seven days of fighting.

The general in command of the infantry division which had taken the southern part of the city loved music and songs to the point of abstraction. In his boyhood he had sung in a church choir for several years. Most likely it was then that he acquired his love for singing. In any case, every person in the division who had a voice and was able to sing was someone special to him, someone whom he knew by their full name, whom he held a special regard for, whom he even took care of in so far as was possible, given that this was simply an infantry division, and not an army or Front headquarters.

Using every means available to him, the general had organised a small musical ensemble in his division, made up of staff medical orderlies. They remained at the rear of the division when things were quiet, and when the situation erupted carried out the wounded as they were supposed to—there was nothing to be done.

Belgrade had been taken and the following morning the division was to move further north, beyond the Danube, without delay.

But the general wanted to celebrate the day in some way. Remembering his ensemble, he decided to put on a concert at the People's Theatre—the largest remaining theatre building in Belgrade—the night before the offensive. News of this venture spread quickly and towards night-time even more guests than were expected had arrived at the spacious theatre.

Many Yugoslav officers and partisans came. So too did the member of the Army Military Council, someone from the Front political department, two generals from the tank corps, several correspondents and even a commissariat colonel from the main administration dealing with captured enemy materiel, with whom only this morning the general had had such high words that one might have thought it better if they had never set eyes on each other.

The night was very dark and very quiet. No doubt it was this that made the lively atmosphere at the entrance particularly noticeable.

One after the other motor cars and jeeps drove up to the fully lit building. The drivers called to one another, banged their doors noisily, and submachine-gunners walked to and fro, white circles of light from their torches sweeping the pavement.

With the rest of her friends in the ensemble, Dusya

Zhelyabova walked across the stage behind the still closed curtain and worked out who would stand where, where to put the stools for the bayan players and how to move the piano a little further away, so that it would not get in the way of the Russian dance.

Everyone was nervous, because they had got tired during the fighting and had not slept for several nights before, because this was an unfamiliar city, but mainly because Sergeant Larikov, their best dancer, had been wounded in the last battle, and Olga Solomina, who had sung lyric songs in the ensemble, had been killed.

Dusya had found herself in the ensemble all of three months ago, completely by chance. She had simply been singing the sad love songs of her native Samara one evening in the battalion where she was a medical instructor, when the general came by. He heard her, made her sing once more in his presence, and then, two days later, ordered that she be included in the ensemble.

Usually she sang her sad love songs, songs from the Volga area and folk ditties accompanied by a Saratov harmonica. But today, with Olga Solomina's death, she had to sing not just for herself but for Olga as well.

She was sad—both sorry for Olga and anxious on her own behalf—how would she sing? Hearing the auditorium fill with people behind the curtain and unable to contain herself, she went up to it and peeped out, drawing it back a fraction.

There were many familiar faces in the hall, but even more unfamiliar ones. Three quarters of the hall was green with the jackets of the Yugoslav partisans. Several Yugoslav priests in black headgarments and cassocks, with large crosses on their breasts sat next to each other in the first row.

Her own people, the Red Army soldiers, sat in silence. Their faces showed the exhaustion of seven days of fighting, but they waited patiently, without exchanging remarks, trying not to do anything that would break the silence in the theatre.

At last the curtain rose. Two bayan players performed "The Moon Is Shining" and a prelude by Liszt. A dance followed, which nearly all the ensemble took part in. Dusya was to perform at the end of the first part, first her "chastooshki", then songs which she had to sing instead of Olga Solomina.

Dusya could see and hear the audience listening to her friends perform. The whole auditorium applauded simultaneously and kept each person on stage in turn, as if not wanting to offend anyone.

During the battles fought in Yugoslavia, 8,000 Soviet troops died.

Dusya was calm as she went on stage. She knew that everything would be all right. She sang her sad songs and ditties "If the Volga bursts her banks, Volga Mother-river", accompanied by a Saratov accordion. She sang them gaily, by heart, and could even see, out of the corner of her eye, the priests in the front row smiling after each one and clapping loudly, lifting their long black sleeves up high.

However she also grew sadder and more anxious as the moment drew near for her to sing Olga Solomina's first song.

The moment came. The song she had to sing began with the words:

What do you yearn for, sailor friend?
Your accordion moans and weeps...

This was a song that Olga had sung particularly well, had put her heart into.

And suddenly Dusya felt that she could not sing it. She looked with dismay at the auditorium, and felt, just at that moment, completely clearly for the first time, that this was a faraway country, that this was Belgrade, and that three quarters of the people in the auditorium were Yugoslavs, people who spoke a language similar to her own but nonetheless one she could not understand.

Probably because of that sudden feeling that she was abroad, she remembered the cold film studio building in the Central Asian town, the face of the director, telling her: "They said it was more useful that I do this," the set for the doorway, the sign on it in foreign letters, and the words of a song from the film they were making, which the whole film studio had been singing that month.

And to her own, and her friends', and the whole audience's surprise, she took a step forward, closed her eyes, and quietly began to sing the words that had suddenly come into her mind:

Over Belgrade a quiet night
Comes to end the day.
Remember the fierce flames bright
The flashes of thunder,
Remember the time of terror—
The black planes in flight...
Clutch your heart—listen close:
A song wafts on the night...
A flame of anger burns in our core,
Angry flames, lead us on into strife!
The hour is come to settle our score!
Blood for blood! A life for a life!
Our dawn lies ahead, Slavs, to war!

She sang the first stanza and the second. She sang without thought for the words, without noticing them.

Scenes from the past were rushing past her eyes: the cold winter days of the first year of the war, and the faraway Central Asian town, and the newspaper reports, ending with the words: "Abandoned after sustained fighting by our troops..." and the unheated film studios, where at exactly the time—my God, how long ago that was!—that those terrible words were appearing in the newspapers, a film was being made about the distant city where she now sang this song.

"Is it possible that at that time someone thought, someone knew that in three years' time we would be in this very city? Is it possible that someone could have guessed that this would happen, that someone could have foreseen it?" Dusya asked herself. And from within herself the answer came, "Yes, yes, however strange it seems, but yes. Someone knew, and thought, and guessed, and foresaw. Most likely that is how it was, as otherwise nothing could have come from what happened in those years."

She finished the song. The audience sat silent as if bewitched.

And then something happened that Dusya had never seen before. People began to clap. They clapped harder and harder. Then they began to shout something, and one by one to get up from their seats, and still they clapped and clapped, on their feet by now.

And she realised that she would not be able to leave unless she sang the song a second time. She raised her hands helplessly before the rumbling and roaring audience.

And the people in the auditorium fell unexpectedly and obediently silent, just as unexpectedly as they had rowdily got to their feet.

Before singing once more, Dusya wanted in this quiet moment to say something that she had only just thought of.

"This song," she said, stepping forward, "is from a film about your city of Belgrade. We filmed it three years ago, a very long way from here, where we had been evacuated. And the Germans had taken Kharkov. And they were near Moscow. But we went on shooting the film all the same. I worked at the film studio at the time."

And because it was herself she was remembering, she got embarrassed, and taking a step backwards, said in confusion:

"That's it... I'll sing it once more."

And she sang the song again.

A small plain girl in a soldier's field shirt and coarse tarpaulin boots stood on the large People's Theatre stage and sang "Night over Belgrade" in a wavering voice, now ringing, now slipping.

And in the auditorium they wept. People wept who had been partisans for three and a half years, who had looked death in the eye many a time.

When I look back on that evening now I think that she perhaps did not sing very well. But people wept.

That, strictly, is all I wanted to relate.

December 20, 1944

VADIM KOZHEVNIKOV

The Mountain Peaks

Vadim Kozhevnikov (1909-1984)—Soviet prose writer, State Prize winner. He was serving in the army since the war began, and was a correspondent for one of the front-line newspapers, and then for *Pravda*. He is the author of the novels *Meeting the Dawn* (1956-1957), *The Shield and the Sword* (1965), *Midday on the Sunny Side* (1973), the stories *Meet Baluyev* (1960), *Pyotr Ryabinkin* (1968) and *The Special Subunit* (1969), and the collections of short stories *Dearest Comrades* (1943), *The Paths of War* (1955), *The Tree of Life* (1963), and others.

Short stories by Kozhevnikov are based on material from the war and usually laconic, written in the style of a sketch. This is true of the story printed below.

It was the last months of the war.

I was flying to Yugoslavia on a troop-carrier that had seen better days. The fuselage, pitted with winter white paint, abounded in metal patches where holes had been, while a new flat surface on the right of the plane bore witness to a recent heavy wound.

The gunner at the machine-gun sat on swing-like canvas straps. His feet, in worn-out high fur boots, swung in front of my face all the time.

I lay on the engine cover which smelled pungently of oil and felt cold. The ribbed panelling of the plane was damp, it radiated iciness, the windows were covered with frost.

Battered iron barrels, daubed with clay, stood close together in the gangway.

Major Panteleyev, the commander of the plane, had told us before we took off: "The weather has guaranteed us against the Messerschmidts. There is no visibility whatsoever. If we crashland, don't be offended: it's my job to warn you."

Even during the heaviest fighting, the front newspaper which I worked for had printed reports on the military operations of the Yugoslav partisans, and they warmed the soldiers' hearts and instilled hope that it would not be long before we would meet the Yugoslavs like brothers. So who, indeed, of the war correspondents would be wavered by such an unpleasant warning from the commander of the plane?

I knew that Panteleyev had recently come out of hospital after being wounded for the third time, that he had not been allowed back to flying combat planes, just troop-carriers. But he was an excellent pilot and in the words of other avaitors, felt "like God" in the sky.

We went at great height, while below lay a cloudy Arctic landscape.

Panteleyev came out of the cockpit and asked me:

"Well, how are you? To be sure you must excuse us, it's like being in an isothermal carriage with this temperature!" And added with some embarrassment, looking round at the barrels standing in the gangway: "Of course, we're not supposed to carry fuel this way, but I'm ashamed to take fuel off them for the return journey. The fuel situation is tight there... So as regards smoking, it's a good idea not to. Or else it might suddenly explode, you know..."

As he wiped the frosted up window with his palm, which stuck to it for a moment, he told us: "In an hour and twenty minutes we will be over Yugoslavia. It's a beautiful country. It's like our Caucasus. It's true, that my idea of the Caucasus comes from Lermontov[1]. I haven't been there personally. Whereas I've been around with the Yugoslavs for too long. I've been knocked down there. Do you know what it's like landing in the mountains? Well, two of our crew were left, the radio operator, Anton Chumachenko and myself. He was a fine-looking young man. Our girls who worked the signals nicknamed him Apollo."

"Did he die, then?" I asked, interested.

"No, he lived to fly another day. When we were landing that time he kept contact with the ground to the very last moment. And then he went and crashed into the tarmac. His whole face was mincemeat."

"What happened next?"

"We bandaged ourselves up like you're supposed to and began to hobble on our two legs in search of some thinly populated place. It was the middle of a snowstorm and pitch dark. Anton's bandages were bulging out with blood. The pain he felt was stupendous. But he held out, all right. You see this bald patch I've got on my head. Only it's not a bald patch, but where the skin and hair got stripped off; you know that was making itself felt too. We walked all night. In the morning the snowstorm died down and it was quite funny. The sun was baking but the snow wasn't thawing. The sweat was pouring off us in our fur flying gear. The snow was glaring, it wasn't possible to look anywhere. I had the sense to smoke up our glasses with a match, and it got better immediately. By night it got cold again. We had torn our uniforms on the stones. The icy cold worked its way into every tear. What on earth is the pleasure that people find in mountain-climbing? I don't understand it. To be honest, we weren't walking by this stage, but rather crawling at a speed of 100 metres an hour. We had lost our strength. But,

I'm sure you can understand that we were determined not to die like orphans in the snow. That's why we didn't give up, why we kept crawling. But everywhere there were all kinds of precipices and ravines—just one wrong move and down you glide. We were strained to such a breaking-point that when a Yugoslav shepherd wanted to frighten us by pointing a gun at us, we burst into tears instead of being delighted. Our nerves, you know, were so upset. He dragged us over to his shack and got us warm. His name was Radule. He was over seventy, and seemed to be made of iron. He dragged in not a log but the whole trunk of an oak tree and thrust it in the hearth so that we would be warmer.

"Other shepherds began to call at the shack too. We told them all about how we've been getting on back home. One of them looked like Comrade Ordjonikidze[2] so I took advantage of this and told them how we had built a factory in naked steppe land. I had worked at Magnitka[3] as a navvy. It had been difficult then with food and a place to live. I explained everything to them. If you're all on the same side, what is there to be ashamed of in this, if it's the truth? I told them it wasn't all handed to us on a plate, that we went to our victories through great hardships. We were putting things right by our own hands. I explained that they weren't to see me as an officer, with medals even. I told them that my family had also been shepherds and that things would be on the up for them too now.

"Through them we got to know a girl. They'd found her as well, covered with wounds, in the mountains. Her name was Ružica. Well, straightaway I should say that she was a beauty. I'm a married man you know but, when she casts a glance at you, well, it's like she's shooting little golden stars into your heart. There are some people on the earth who can just do this to you. But she wasn't very trusting of us. I felt she doubted that we were real Soviet people.

"And suddenly I began to notice that at night Chumachenko was washing his bandages and putting on clean ones in the morning. But not for medical purposes so much as for his looks. He always paid a great deal of attention to his appearance. He would even stink of eau-de-Cologne, had a fashionable haircut, and his boots shone as if he were not a pilot but an artiste from a song and dance ensemble. Of course, the girls, radio operators, had not nicknamed him Apollo for nothing. But he behaved arrogantly with them. Once on a flight one of them handed him a letter she had written and afterwards he told her off, like Eugene Onegin[4].

"The way I see it, even if the intimate side of things is all to no good in wartime, you have to respect such feelings.

And why, one asks, does he make such a fuss of his appearance when he knows how it affects others. I didn't like this at all.

"And you'll never guess what I caught him out on: I noticed him showing his Komsomol card to Ružica.

" 'Listen, Chumachenko,' I said to him, 'why are you misleading the girl? You're showing her the photo on your card, it's like you're telling her, "look what a pretty face I've got." But now it's completely different. Surely it's not right to take her in like this. It's no good!'

"But my telling off came too late. I could see by Ružica's eyes that it was a bad business. She had such sad eyes, well, you know they were just like the eyes of that girl, whom he had told off in front of everybody.

"Eh, I thought, what an unpleasant business. They had received us so warmly here, and the Soviet pilot had misled the girl. I ordered Chumachenko not to go away anywhere, as if he was under house arrest, although of course I was sorry for the girl, too. But to my amazement she became very cheerful. Well, I thought, what shaky principles our young people have. But my Chumachenko drooped completely, and even stopped washing out his bandages. He just said one thing over and over again: it's shameful to be eating shashlyk here when the people are at war. And demanded that we go to the partisans.

"However much we questioned our hosts about where the partisans were, they just lifted their hands and said: rest, you're still weak.

"But we noticed an anxiety among our shepherds. What was it about? They said that they were going to drive the sheep to a new pasture and went away. Chumachenko and I weighed up our situation and came to a joint decision that we had to go and find the partisans. It didn't look good for Soviet military servicemen to create a resort for themselves here.

"We equipped ourselves and walked up and down along the mountain paths.

"Nature was astonishingly beautiful: snow-capped mountains as if made of glass, pine woods lower down, and still further down, blue rivers in green valleys.

"It was quiet and translucent walking along the path. Now and then a waterfall would begin to rumble, like a train, and above it there would be a rainbow from the spray.

"It was awkward to see such beauty, when the war around us was ruining people's lives.

"Chumachenko walked in silence. And although his face

was not visible underneath the bandage, I could tell that he was angry with me. But what about?

"We sat on a stone to rest, and he said:

" 'Major, you were wrong to think ill of Ružica and I. She had been sent here by the Party, to give information about enemy movements. But her portable radio transmitter had stopped working. She checked my documents before asking me to fix it. I didn't go into the mountains with her to lark about, but to repair the radio transmitter. She asked me not to bother you, and besides, wanted to avoid other people knowing. That's all there is to it. Well, I gave her my word, and that's why I kept quiet.'

" 'Well,' I said, 'forgive me, Junior Lieutenant. Indeed, I thought otherwise.'

"Soon Chumachenko and I hit on a German military outpost. At first we decided that this was a reconnaissance party. We got mixed up in some fighting. And as happens in such situations, I'm sure you know, we came off badly. At the last moment Yugoslav partisans came to our rescue. These partisans were our very own shepherds. They had been waiting in ambush. We had ruined their operation by sallying out. The result was heavy fighting. This time Chumachenko was wounded in the stomach.

"He was taken on a stretcher into the valley, to the formation headquarters. And by this time our plane had landed there.

"Just before we took off Ružica came to the aerodrome.

"I told her: 'I'm sorry, but the Junior Lieutenant is in a serious condition, and must not be disturbed.'

"She asked me: 'I only want to shake his hand. And thank him once more.'

"I went off to Chumachenko and asked him: 'Anton, can you say goodbye to a young woman representative? She's very insistent.'

"But he understood at once who I was talking about.

" 'Is it her?' he asked.

" 'Yes,' I replied.

"I told Ružica: 'Go on. But let me warn you, just keep a hold on yourself.'

"Eh, I thought, what will come of this? You see it was an insufferable sort of thing to watch. I felt sorry for both of them.

"She went up to Anton, stopped, seemed to freeze, then suddenly fell on her knees by the stretcher, seized his head and started to kiss him. And she begged him to stay. She called him by words so tender that I can't even repeat them. 'My own,' she said, 'my own.'

"And the time came to take off. Both had to go their separate ways...

"That's how the story turned out.

"On leaving hospital Chumachenko returned to the unit. The surgeons improved his face, of course. But it was nothing in comparison with what it had been like before. We didn't let on. Only the signals girls would go pale when they saw him. But he didn't pay them any attention.

"Chumachenko died right near Belgrade. A Messerschmidt fired at us, the whole cockpit was in smithereens. Incendiaries went right through Anton's chest..."

"And what about Ružica?"

"Ružica? She would come to the aerodrome and question everybody. But we were fainthearted. We've told her he was flying on another Front. 'Look,' we said, 'the war will end and he'll come to you as a free civilian.' She'll probably come to the aerodrome today too. But what should I say to her? Who could act differently with love like that? It's the kind of thing people write poetry about..."

The airplane began to descend. The land of Yugoslavia appeared below us, flooded with sunshine, with blue rivers, oak groves, and a snow of astounding purity on the mountain peaks.

1945

EMMANUIL KAZAKEVICH

Heart of a Friend

(Chapters)

Emmanuil Kazakevich (1913-1962)—Soviet prose writer, State Prizes winner. During the war he rose from a private in the Moscow People's Volunteer Corps division to assistant chief of intelligence of one of the armies which took part in the storming of Berlin.

Kazakevich is the author of works about World War II and the postwar years—the stories *Star* (1947), *Two in the Steppe* (1948), a tale about Lenin, *The Blue Notebook* (1961), the novel *Spring on the Oder* (1949), and others.

The extract printed below is taken from the story *Heart of a Friend* (1953) and describes the battle between Soviet soldiers and the Nazis in Norway.

Chapter Eight

Ashore

3

The blue twilight encompassed the battalion on all sides. The hazy northern lights seemed poised calmly overhead. Birds screeched among the rocks.

The cold wind blowing in the men's faces dispelled their sleepiness. The piercing cries of the birds and all the unwonted atmosphere awoke a strange feeling of alarm in the marines. In minutes like those it did the man good to look at the massive silhouette of the battalion commander marching with a swinging gait in front of them, looking back now and again so that they saw his broad, half-mocking, inspiringly calm face. Sometimes he would speak and then the men nearest to him smiled and those at the back smiled too, although they had not heard what he said.

"That's the stuff!" Yegorov muttered approvingly.

The wireless message had ordered the battalion to place itself temporarily at the orders of the commander of a rifle division, representatives of which were to meet it at a crossroads south of Kirkenes, near some houses which were still intact. When the marines arrived, however, they found nobody there. Akimov placed guards and ordered the men to make themselves comfortable in the houses while waiting. Then he sent two men to bring Minevich's company while he, Martynov and Matyukhin knocked at the door of the first house, beside which the Norwegian flag was flying.

© E. Kazakevich, *Heart of a Friend*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1958, pp. 225-237.

The small house was full of Norwegian men, women and children, some lying on mattresses, some sitting on chairs, others on the bare floor along the walls. It looked more like a caravanserai than a house. When Akimov entered, children's eyes were riveted on him from all sides. He stopped in embarrassment, almost making up his mind that it was no use taking up room where there was already intolerably little. But a tall thin man with stubbly cheeks rose from the table and went towards him, blinking with excitement. He started speaking and the children's eyes seemed to sparkle from all over the room while those of the women melted in smiles and the men uttered dignified grunts.

Three chairs were soon placed for Akimov and his companions near a long table on which carbide lamps were burning. The master of the house went on speaking and though the Russians could not understand him, as he well knew, the expression on his face was so eloquent in its radiance that Akimov, Martynov and Matyukhin smiled too and felt their situation rather awkward but very pleasant.

The host was a miner, as he was eager to explain to his guests. But it was not until his youngest daughter—a clever-looking girl called Öse—thought of showing them a photograph of him in his miner's clothes with his pick in his hand that he was at last understood. Then the Russians heartily shook hands with him, and he began to tell them something, supplementing his words with gestures and rolling his eyes despondently when he saw they did not understand him. The only words they could make out were Communist and *Tysker*—the latter being the Norwegian for Germans.

"Is he a Communist?" Martynov asked hesitatingly, pointing at the master of the house.

"*Ja, ja, ja!*" the whole room answered.

There could be no doubt about it: that was no trick to win favour with the Russian officers. Here was none of the cringing respect that Akimov had noticed in the demeanour and words of the Kirkenes burgomaster, Olsen, the schoolmaster, or the rich Vikkola.

Martynov was perhaps as excited as the Norwegians. He took his Party card, poked himself in the chest and then did the same to Akimov and said, "See, Communists. Me, him."

The master of the house cautiously took the little booklet, showed it to his wife, his children and everybody else, and then gave it back to Martynov. When the latter had put it away the miner unexpectedly embraced first him and then Akimov. Then he went hesitantly to Matyukhin, but stopped short of him and asked, "Communist?"

"No," said Matyukhin, shaking his head. "I'm non-Party."

The miner was surprised, for he thought everybody in Russia was a Communist, but Akimov burst into laughter and pushed him towards Matyukhin. The Norwegian laughed in his turn, and embraced Matyukhin too.

A girl, whose name, as she told the Russians with a curtsy, was Ingrid, ran into the next room and came back with some flat meal cakes called *knekkebröd*, which the people there ate instead of bread. After a good deal of consideration Matyukhin took out of his kit-bag a flask he had been saving up. Glasses appeared on the table, and a drop was poured into each. Everybody rose. The Norwegians, their eyes fixed on those of the Russians, put their glasses to their hearts, said *Skål* and drank slowly. The Russians said *na zdorovye* and drank it down in one gulp.

The master of the house, sometimes speaking, sometimes just smiling, clasped his hands in despair when he was unable to make himself understood. He told how hard it had been for Communists there, how the owners of the Sud Varanger Works lorded it over the whole region as if it had been their private domain and how the yellowest of unions held sway in the works. He, a simple miner, he said, had taken in a number of families, whose homes had been burned; he had done so because he was a Communist and was obliged to help those who were victims of misfortune. But not everybody shared that sentiment of solidarity, and many homeless families had to live literally in the street.

Martynov listened attentively, shaking his head; he realised that the things their host was speaking of were very important and he was wild at himself for not being able to understand him. "Believe me, we must learn Norwegian," he whispered to Akimov.

One of the women wound up a gramophone. Perhaps they intended to have a folk dance, but just then the door burst open and a colonel in a tall astrakhan hat and a leather coat rushed in, making the floorboards creak under his weight. He was the representative from the rifle division that Akimov was waiting for. He looked around in astonishment at the colourful gathering but did not pass any remark. Then he went up to Akimov and said sharply the single word, "Come."

There was an uneasy look in his eyes, and Akimov immediately rose and followed him to the door. But there he stood rooted to the ground. The record that had just been put on struck a chord in his mind. More than that, it seemed somehow part of himself, so full it was of radiant intimate reminiscences.

"Anitra's Dance, by Grieg," he said and the words see-

med to come not from his lips but from Anichka's. He saw quite clearly the dug-out lined with willow switches and everything that he associated with that music.

The Norwegians were filled with astonished delight when they heard those familiar words drop from the lips of the Russian officer. "*Ja, ja, ja!*" the whole room at once shouted with enthusiasm.

"Just a minute," Akimov said, and despite the colonel's impatient look he would not move until the record was over. He wondered how a melody so dear to him was played in such a far-off country, and only when the sounds died away did he remember that the composer was a Norwegian, a son of that country and probably the pride of his people.

Akimov left the little Norwegian house at last and went with the colonel to the green staff car waiting by the cross-roads. Both officers took out their maps.

"The situation's complicated," the colonel said. "The Germans have started a counter-attack in the Polmak area on the Tanaelv. It may be a very serious counterstroke. Large enemy concentrations have been detected on the west bank of the river. I'll give you ten lorries to take at least part of your battalion there but I can't give you any more for the time being. The others will have to go on foot. Go into action immediately."

"I understand," Akimov answered. "Everything will be done." He was silent for a while and then he said, smiling, "When you hear music that you know, it's like meeting an old friend."

"Eh? What did you say?" asked the colonel, whose thoughts were far from music. Akimov did not answer. He went with his swinging stride to his battalion, which was already formed up on the road.

The first company got on the lorries which had just driven up, and Akimov jumped on to the running board of the first one and shouted to the short oil-smeared driver, "Off we go! Step on it!" The column drove off.

"Switch your headlights on, what are you afraid of?" said Akimov, getting into the seat next to the driver. "We won't go far this way, but we've got to go quickly. The Germans have got something up their sleeve."

The lorries raced along the stony road between the rocks. All the time Akimov could hear the strange graceful melody. It sounded no longer sad but challenging and fascinating, even somewhat alarming, and it brought back to his mind familiar scenes. The rugged land around him seemed to lose its harshness and become attractive. The cries of the birds overhead and the blue twilight no longer jarred on him. For

a moment he almost forgot the war and thought he was just travelling through unknown interesting places about which he would have to tell Anichka soon. He must try not to forget anything, to remember every detail, the shrill cries of the birds soaring over the cliffs along the road, the thankful faces of the Norwegian men, women and children, the red Norwegian flag with its blue cross fluttering from all the flagstaffs as a sign of liberation. And so many other things.

Soon shell-bursts were heard and a fire broke out ahead, its glare setting off the dark silhouette of a village and a long strip of wood in the distance. That must be the wood stretching along the Tanaelv valley, Akimov thought, for behind the trees he could guess the outline of the cliff winding along the bed of the river.

On a cliff to the left of the road dark figures could be seen surveying the west through binoculars, while at the foot of the cliff signalmen were dragging drums of telephone wire.

Akimov stopped the column, jumped out, went up the cliff and said to the officers, "Well, what's going on? I'm Akimov. Arrived with Marine Corps."

They all looked round and you could see the joy on their faces. One, probably the senior among them, pointed to the fire.

"There's your direction, Comrade Akimov," he said. "We'll give you a mortar company." Then he shouted, "Hey, mortars!"

The mortar lieutenant came, saluted Akimov and said, "I've to report to you."

After a talk with the officers, Akimov went down the cliff and shouted, "Debus there!"

The marines were out of the lorries and formed up on the road in a second. Then they marched off, Akimov in front with Kozlovsky and the mortar lieutenant, Akimov looked sideways at the mortar lieutenant and said, "Don't fire your mortars without an order from me. No use smashing up houses for nothing."

A few German shells burst not far off; they had apparently come from the western bank of the river.

"Spread the men out in a line," Akimov ordered, turning to Kozlovsky. "Off we go."

The sailors crept over the rocks, their figures sharply detached against the light sky.

"What's your name?" Akimov asked the mortar officer.

"Seliverstov, Comrade Major."

"Well, Comrade Seliverstov, don't fire yet. Stay by me. What we've got to do is to drive the Germans out of the village without giving them time to blow the houses up. If

2,122 Soviet soldiers died in the battles for the liberation of Northern Norway from fascism.

you're allowed to fire those mortars, you'll blow them to pieces yourself, even if your intentions are good. So don't be angry."

"I'm not angry," said Seliverstov, embarrassed.

They went forward slowly. A runner came and reported that the Germans were retreating without haste and setting fire to the houses. The inhabitants were fleeing into the woods. On the river there was a flotilla of motor launches. Artillery was firing from the western bank.

"You must attack!" Akimov shouted. "What are you out hanging around for? Waiting for them to do their stuff and run away?"

From the boulder on which he had climbed he had a view of the wooded opposite bank, on which flashes of artillery were seen now here, now there.

"I'll make you pay for Badeikin," he muttered. "I'll teach you to set fire to houses!"

He rushed down the cliff towards the wood and soon reached the first trees. It was dark there. Between the trunks he could see the shining ribbon of the river skirting the wood. Farther to the left, in a curve of the river, were a lot of small motor craft, apparently Norwegian, commandeered from the whole length of the river.

"Forward, sailors!" Akimov shouted.

There was a clatter of machine-guns, submachine-guns, and rifles all along the bank. Then a shout, "Hurrah!"

"Seliverstov," said Akimov, "it's your turn now. Give those boats a taste."

Seliverstov said a few words to the soldiers accompanying him and raised his binoculars to his eyes. Bullets whistled through the trees. The motors of the boats started to throb. Beautiful coloured flares shot up.

Akimov ran down to the river. Now and then he brushed against the fir trees and the roughness of the trunks made him tingle with pleasure.

"That you, Tulyakov?" he asked a man at a machine-gun.

"Yes, Comrade Commander."

"Let 'em have it, let 'em have it! What's that man Seliverstov doing? Not a bad river. Pretty. Rapids. Doesn't freeze either. Mountain river. Move over to the left along the bank."

The men went slowly along the left bank towards the village. The mortars opened fire at last, scattering the German boats on the river. Everything around was rumbling and trembling. Bullets whistled sinisterly among the trees.

"Comrade Commander! Comrade Commander! Where is he?"

"He was here just now."

"Comrade Commander!"

There was no answer. Matyukhin prodded among the trees, looking for Akimov.

"Tulyakov! Tulyakov!" Matyukhin shouted, bending down over the machine-gunner. "Answer me!"

"What?"

"Where's the battalion commander?"

"He's there," Tulyakov said. He turned away from his machine-gun and blinked with amazement: the battalion commander was not there.

Matyukhin saw Akimov lying at the river's edge. One hand, large and sunburnt, was hanging in the water, the fingers forming four little waterfalls.

"A-a-ah!" screamed Matyukhin, like a woman.

Everybody heard that scream above the roar of the artillery and the mortars, the splashing of the water and the shouts of the Germans. Figures came running up, first Ventsov's men from the right, then Martynov and Kozlovsky from the left. They picked Akimov up and carried him into the village. Somebody tried to drag Matyukhin away but he snapped: "Don't touch me. Leave me alone. I don't want to live."

Akimov heard Matyukhin's shout, but he thought it was the noise of the rapids or the cry of a night bird, something proceeding not from man but from nature. He came to himself for a second while they were carrying him and thought that Martynov and Matyukhin and somebody else had been sitting by his bed night after night and he wanted to tell them it was all right, they should go and get a sleep, for they certainly needed one. He said that, he thought, and they went away, just vanished, and now he was thirsty and there was nobody to give him a drink, for he had ordered them all away from his bed. He fancied he was lying in his bunk on the ship and it was rocking and rocking, more and more and more, and his naked heart was bumping against something that was sharp and blunt at the same time. The rocking became so violent and threw his heart with such force against that sharp yet blunt object that the pain swelled and swelled till he could bear it no longer. That couldn't go on, he thought, it had to stop; he couldn't torture his heart like that,—it wasn't his. Perhaps in that instant he thought of Anichka. He couldn't think of her name, he couldn't remember her face or even who she was, but in his head there was a spot of light and joy in which she and everything he loved in life were united. And it was that spot of light and joy that his heart, trembling with pain and struggle, belonged to.

He shuddered and then lay still.

"It's over," said Martynov, and he tore open the front of his tunic as sailors do when going into an attack.

They carried the battalion commander cautiously as if he had been alive, for no one could believe that such a massive powerful body, such a brave restless heart, just now so full of life, had ceased to exist. It was strange to see him lying motionless, as if he had always lain like that and did not wish to be in any other position. Two other men who had been killed were carried behind him, two young sailors, Ivanov and Goryushkin. Their death would also rent with sorrow and despair the hearts of those who had known them as Akimov's friends had known him.

Near the Lapp settlement, in the midst of poor tents made of reindeer skins stretched on poles, Martynov ordered a halt. It soon began to snow heavily. The Lapps harnessed their beasts to the sleighs on which the killed had been laid. The reindeer reared their antlers and warily pricked up their ears. The Lapps walked beside the sleighs, small frightened men. The smell of them was the smell of fish. Their headgear was a tall pointed cap of many colours like a clown's.

The reccy detachment appeared, nobody knew from where. Letyagin, who was in front, came and asked where Commander Akimov was. The only answer he got was a gesture in the direction of the sleigh. The red scar on his forehead turned pale.

They went on, Letyagin walking beside the sleigh, awkward though it was, for now and then he tripped up in the snow. But he went on beside it, for it seemed to him that it was necessary and important to look at Akimov's face under the ground sheet...

The Norwegian authorities allotted a place for a cemetery at the foot of Høibutmuen Plateau. That was where the Russians who had been herded to Norway and tortured to death there by the Nazis were buried. The bodies of the officers and men from Kirkenes units and ships who had been killed in the last days' fighting were brought there. The Norwegians set their flags at halfmast. Dressed in black, they came on skis or on foot over the freshly fallen snow to the new cemetery. Soviet military and naval units marched there too.

Letyagin and Martynov went side by side, both of them in silence. The sharp words of command seemed to have a peculiar dull and mournful echo amid the rocks and cliffs. Heavier and thicker fell the snow.

As he looked at the tense faces of the Norwegian men and the weeping women, Letyagin wondered whether they under-

stood that the events of the last few days had given them a place in world history; whether they realised that the names of Jarfjordboten, Elvenes, Björnevatn, Høibutmuen and other places on the edge of Europe, the province of Finnmark, which had been slaked with Russian blood, were henceforth historical and not just geographical facts.

Letyagin contemplated the motionless faces of the soldiers and thought that the presence of any foreign army, be it even allied, on any soil is a burden for the population, but that no army had ever tried to be less of a burden than the Soviet Army; no army had observed such voluntary self-restraint or shown such an example of disinterestedness and friendship as the Soviet Army.

Filled with these grave but inspiring thoughts, Letyagin at last resolved to look at the face of Akimov. It was calm and handsome. Letyagin felt that Akimov was going to open his eyes and say something. What could he say? His deep pealing voice would say, probably to the accompaniment of a sarcastic laugh: "Enough of this! Why prolong the agony! Bury me and have done with it."

The silly thought almost brought tears to Letyagin's eyes. He pressed his lips together and looked sideways at Martynov. He was standing there as white as a sheet.

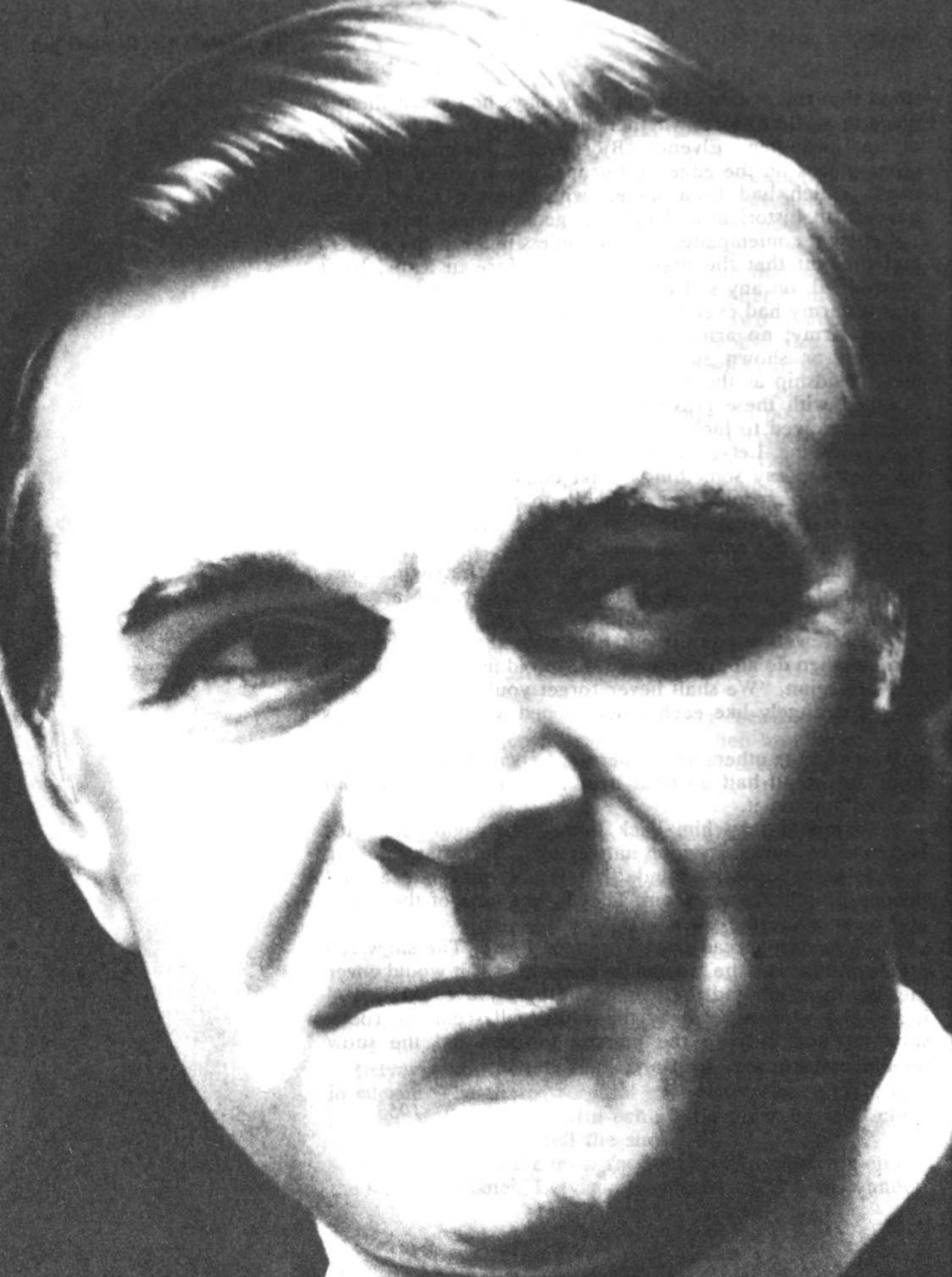
The farewell salvo rang out. The women wept and wailed as all women do all over the world. An old fisherman shouted in Norwegian, "We shall never forget you!" Two girls who looked strangely like each other sobbed aloud, and all was over.

When all the others had dispersed, Letyagin and Martynov stood for about half an hour near the wooden obelisk with the red star on it.

"We should take him back home," Letyagin said. "It's better to be buried in your native soil." But after thinking a while he changed his mind. "No, the Norwayers are good people. They'll respect them. They'll take care of the tombs and clear away the snow."

A white mist spread over Varanger Fjord. The snow fell in heavy flakes on the sea and on the land as if it would cover the sea, the cliffs and the plateau. But the waves swallowed it and the wind blew away the white pall from the rocky summits, and only in the marshy lowland did the snow remain undisturbed, deep and indifferent.

1953



YURI BONDAREV

The Last Shots

(Chapters)

CHAPTER 13

"Don't go out to the guns yet. They'll call you if you're needed... Tomorrow you'll be sending me to the field dressing-station. But it's in Kasno—and Kasno is surrounded, isn't it? I never thought that right at the end of the war I'd be cut off—surrounded by Germans."

"They've cut the road to the east, yes... but that doesn't matter. We'll take you there, you and Gusev. Gorbachov will. He's the one for that kind of job."

"Tomorrow... My wound doesn't amount too much. No hurry. I... Sit down, please. Sit down beside me."

Novikov sat down on an ammunition box at the side of the bunk and, without speaking, searched in one pocket after another for cigarettes. Occasional shell-bursts close at hand shook the roof of the dug-out and the earth falling to the floor sounded like the scampering of mice.

"H'm! There is a bit of luck. No cigarettes. Ah well, there's always *makhorka**." With a sigh he shook the tobacco grains out of his cigarette case, scratched his nose and smiled with a boyish look on his face that Lena had seldom seen there. As he was searching for scraps of *makhorka* in his map-case, he came upon the slabs of chocolate Alyoshin had given him to take to Lena and a puzzled frown wiped the boyish smile off his face.

"Just look at this," he muttered, "Alyoshin sent them to you. I kept reminding myself about them and then it slipped my memory when we had that bit of trouble. I'm sorry."

"From Alyoshin to me?" she repeated in surprise. "Chocolate?"

© Yuri Bondarev, *The Last Shots*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1961, pp. 245-306.

* A type of strong, crude tobacco.—*Tr.*

Yuri Bondarev (B. 1924)—Soviet prose writer, Lenin and State Prizes winner. He was just seventeen years of age when, on finishing school, he went to the front, serving throughout the war with the artillery. His wartime experience served as the basis for all his later work—the stories *The Battalions Request Fire* (1957), *The Last Shots* (1959), the novels *The Hot Snow* (1969) *The Choice* (1981), and others.

Bondarev reconstructs in precise detail the situation of those directly involved in battle, revealing the complex motives behind the actions of people of diverse character and temperament.

The ethical complexity and drama that marks Bondarev's prose is illustrated in the extracts from *The Shore* (1975) and the story *The Last Shots* printed below.

"Yes, he's a good lad, Alyoshin, and I think he's in love with you... Yes, it looks like it," said Novikov with well-feigned casualness.

"In love with me?" Lena sat up on the bunk, tossed her hair back off her face and burst into laughter. "Why, he's just a boy—and he thinks I like chocolate! Ovchinnikov thought I loved perfume and lipstick and silly things like that."

She gave Novikov a long, searching look, her eyes still sparkling with laughter. After a time she said softly; "Hand me the paper and tobacco and I'll roll you a cigarette. I've done it thousands of times for my wounded. You're so tired that your hands are shaking... You *are* tired, aren't you?" She tore off a scrap of newspaper, poured the tobacco into it, rolled the cigarette with deft fingers and said as she offered him it: "There you are. Lick the edge, and that's that."

"You do it, please. You'll make a better job of it," said Novikov. He was in the grip of poignantly tender emotions which had never left him since that moment in Ovchinnikov's dug-out when she had pressed her head against his cheek, emotions that had gained new force when, after that explosion, he had seen her sinking to her knees, her hand against her breast. Now the feelings surged up in him again, stimulated by her happy, tender laughter, the neatly rolled cigarette she had made for him, the way her silky fair hair fell across her cheek.

In these three years of war, which had laid responsibility upon him at too early an age, he had grown used to thinking about others rather than himself, living their lives rather than his own, making allowances for them that he would never make for himself. He had also come to assume that no one else need show any concern about him.

Lena was running the tip of her tongue along the edge of the paper when she suddenly stopped and said firmly: "No. You do it for yourself." When he took the cigarette from her he felt her fingers trembling. He noticed with surprise that there was a tender, troubled look in the depths of her steady, unblinking eyes, and he asked: "What's wrong, Lena?"

"I rolled that cigarette for you, but you're not one of my wounded. I can't imagine you wounded." She spoke quickly and watched him intently as he lit the cigarette, shielding the flame with his cupped hand in a way that had become habitual to him. "I've noticed it's usually the younger ones who get themselves killed or wounded. Why? Carelessness or lack of experience?... You're not one of the careful ones. I've noticed that... Maybe you don't value your life very highly?"

"I haven't really begun to live," said Novikov thoughtfully. "I certainly don't expose myself to danger on purpose, but sometimes it seems I've no choice... I feel at times that the war years have filled my whole life. If I dig down through the layers of years I get a glimpse of something else—the Mining Institute, books, a reading-lamp. All that part of my past could be told in one line, but it's different about more recent things. For instance, that one business of knocking out the tanks—that would take a page to itself. Perhaps that's why I seem not to care about my life... No, that's not the whole story—there could be another reason."

"What's this 'other reason'?"

"Soon after I volunteered in '41 we were surrounded and captured, ten thousand of us, near Smolensk. Besides us students—mere boys—there was a sprinkling of old professors. Some of these professors refused to believe that such a thing as cruelty existed and to the very last would speak about German culture—Bach and Heine and so on. But the Germans lined us up in close formation on the Smolensk Highway, brought up tanks and even anti-aircraft guns and opened fire on us. They wiped half of us out and marched the rest of us in a long column through Smolensk to the west."

"And then?"

"In Smolensk, three other students of my year and I escaped and managed to cross the front lines. But all through the war I've never forgotten about that German 'humanitarianism."

"Yes, I know them—know them just as you do," said Lena, her eyes narrowed in hatred. "They invaded our very lives... But about you yourself—can't you in some way be more careful of your life?"

"But I *am* careful," protested Novikov with a smile. "Really, I am."

During their hours together Lena had seen this smile of his several times. It was a fleeting smile, but the moment it appeared his more usual frown of concentration would vanish and his face would become gentle, happy and boyishly eager. In these moments she had a glimpse of another Novikov, a Novikov she had never known and would never know because in this fleeting smile of his there was his past, this other life of his that had ended with the war...

Two explosions in quick succession rocked the dug-out and compressed the warm air inside it. Lumps of earth from the roof fell with a loud rustling in the straw and the "candlestick" on the table, a spent shell-case, toppled over and rolled to the floor, throwing the dug-out into darkness. In the

gloom the rustle of earth falling on the straw sounded louder, and from close at hand a machine-gun started chattering angrily.

"That's a tank attack," said Novikov jumping to his feet.

"Wait!" whispered Lena with a quaver in her voice. "No, don't put the light on... Tell me this: I know you didn't like me when I first joined the battery. I know what you thought of me... You heard, of course, about that aide-de-camp, Sinkov. He thought he was strong enough to do anything he liked with me. I struggled—he struck me—and I slapped him, hard. So I left recon. Afterwards, all kinds of strories went around about me."

Novikov was silent.

"Will you kiss me?" she said quietly.

In the darkness he could not see her face, but the soft tones of her voice made him intensely aware of her nearness, and his heart contracted with a tender, numbing pain. With outstretched hands he came closer and bent over her as she lay full length, on the bunk. He felt under his hands her slim, eager body. Her warm fingers caressed his face, his neck, his shoulders, and her breathing burned his cheek. Unrestrainedly she put her arms around him and a faintly-breathed whisper led him to her tender, yielding lips. They were drawn together in a long kiss. Another double explosion set the roof-beams groaning and earth rained down on the straw. Again the machine-gun answered with its vicious rat-tat-tat. Novikov raised his head.

"I've got to see how things are at the guns," he said in a strangely gentle voice, and tore himself away from the warmth of her arms and her breast. In his confusion of feelings he found himself at a loss for words, and it was in embarrassed, hoarse tones that he went on: "Is your wound hurting you? Shall I put the light on?"

"No. You'd better go. I'll be waiting for you."

The communication trench, lit by the glare from the burning town, seemed to be almost in daylight after the blackness of the dug-out. The red haze with its ragged edges now rose to a great height and stretched for more than two miles, and it seemed to Novikov that all the town, even the suburbs, was on fire. The rumble of battle had taken on a sharper, clearer note and the wave of sound seemed to reach him from a point to the west, nearer his gun positions. German rocket-propelled missiles made fantastic curves in the sky like the bodies of strange fish in a sea of fire. The whole height echoed with the rapid succession of shell-bursts.

Novikov stood for some moments taking in the scene—the

twinkling of signal rockets that rose from the shore of the lake, the swift lines of light from tank guns on the outskirts of the town that were firing almost horizontally, the half-heard noise of tank engines and treads. But he was still reliving those precious moments in the dug-out, still intoxicated with the nearness of Lena's warm, yielding body, the soft fingers that had caressed his face and neck, the lips that had met his own so eagerly. He could still hardly believe that for the first time in his life he had kissed a woman and that she had returned his kisses with all the deliberate abandon of complete surrender.

As he approached the first gun-pit he called out quietly to the sentry. No one answered. He stepped down into the pit and saw that the sentry, Remeshkov, was there with the gun-crew. They were sitting on the gun-trail, smoking and talking in whispers. Only Gorbachov was sleeping. Stretched out on a row of boxes with a groundsheet pulled over his head, he was breathing noisily and tossing restlessly in his sleep. The clips of bullets pushed into the tops of his boots pressed hard into the flesh of his legs.

The men on the gun-trail turned expectant, questioning faces towards Novikov. Remeshkov, who had been speaking to the others, wiped his mouth with the palm of his hand; his face shone pink in the flare.

"Why aren't you sleeping?" asked Novikov. "When the trouble starts you'll be nodding off to sleep." He sat down on the parapet. Porokhonko stubbed out his cigarette and sighed dejectedly. Drawing his knees up to his chest he rested his narrow, unshaven chin on them and gazed questioningly at Novikov.

"We can't sleep for the tanks," muttered Stepanov guiltily, wriggling his stumpy legs into a more comfortable position. He rubbed and wiped his plump cheeks, as if he were washing his face, then, for some reason, gazed at the palms of his hands. His fingers were trembling.

"The tanks have got through right to the outskirts of the town," he went on bluntly, although there was an apologetic note in his voice. "They're letting us have it point-blank... I suppose it was too much for our boys in the town, and they ran for it. And now I expect we're hanging on here with no flank support."

"Too much for our boys?" Novikov quoted back at him.

"And maybe tonight we'll be all dead," ventured Stepanov, again wiping his soft, round cheeks nervously.

"We'll be drinking your health at your wedding when the war's over," said Novikov reassuringly. "You've got a girl waiting for you, haven't you?"

Stepanov forced a smile and from under his lowered eyebrows gave Novikov an embarrassed look. "I'm married, Comrade Captain. Got spliced just after I left school."

"These young fools have no patience," broke in Porokhonko, without lifting his chin from his knees. "If you'd been at my school I'd have told your ma to take your pants down and smack some simple arithmetic into that fat backside of yours... Nothing very clever about getting into bed with your wife. You don't need brains to do that." He turned to Novikov and in his usual self-assured voice asked: "Isn't that so, Comrade Captain?"

However, what struck Novikov most was the fact that this awkward, shy lad was married. He felt a strange surprise at learning that Stepanov had had something in his life that had never fallen to his own lot.

"Stepanov, you had the right idea," he said. "Any children?"

"No time for that."

"A pity! There should be children waiting when a soldier comes home."

A loud explosion from a shell that landed only about thirty paces from the gun blotted out the noice of the distant cannonade. Showers of earth rained down on the gun-put and shell-splinters whistled angrily over their heads, smacking heavily on the ground just beyond them. At the same time a machine-gun opened fire from close at hand and streams of bullets cut the air to the left of them. No one spoke. All eyes were turned towards the town.

"That was a hot one. The tanks must have got clean through the town," said Remeshkov. He glanced sideways at where the splinters were falling, but did not lower his head.

"Did you see where that one came from, Comrade Captain?" asked Stepanov excitedly. "Where have the Germans got to now? Under our very noses, it seems. The boys in Kasno couldn't hold out, but we're still hanging on here."

Now all eyes were fixed on Novikov. It seemed as if the men expected him to say quite bluntly that the Germans had in fact broken through and that between their guns and the town there was little or no infantry support. Novikov knew that that might well be the case. He knew, too, that no smooth, reassuring words of his could dispel the alarm that his men felt, and that it would be foolish even to attempt to lull their fears. So he told them bluntly:

"It's too easy to convince yourselves that the Germans will capture Kasno and get through into Czechoslovakia.

If they succeed in that—if you *allow* them to succeed in that—you must know, Stepanov, that the war would drag on much longer. You don't want that?... Neither do I. Well, it's up to us. If we let them go past us they'll get through without any heavy fighting, quietly, in good order; they'll crush the Slovak rising and save their strength for a real show-down later. Is that clear?... Was it for nothing that we lost half our battery's strength? And we werent't the only ones to suffer... Well, that's the situation, Stepanov. What have you got to say to that?"

"But why ask me, Comrade Captain? I simply said—" Stepanov's voice trailed off into an embarrassed silence.

"All right, all right. People say all sorts of things. Let's forget about it." Novikov's tones were now completely friendly and he was smiling slightly. "Remeshkov, what were you talking about when I arrived? I'd like to hear about it. But if it's secreet I'll slip away."

"Ech! He was just blabbering a lot of nonsense about some old woman or other," scoffed Porokhonko morosely and lay down on the groundsheet. "Lyagalov, now—used to talk about things he'd known in peacetime. Talked like a book, he did. But this Remeshkov just opens his mouth and slobbers. Makes you sick, it does. Spins lies by the yard, but he's not even a good liar."

"Honest to God, Comrade Captain, I wasn't telling any lies," protested Remeshkov, his pale eyelashes blinking excitedly. "I was telling about an old woman, a neighbour, who went berry-picking in the forest... And none of that semaphore signalling from you, Porokhonko; I'm telling the truth... Well, then, this old woman fell down a hole. There's a lot of dried-up wells in the forest, you know, and they're full of snakes—all kinds of snakes. So some people from the nearest kolkhoz found her, five days later. She was covered with snakes from head to foot, and dead."

His eyes fixed on the fiery arcs of the rocket-shells, he paused dramatically as if waiting for an invitation to continue his story, but no invitation came. A grunt from Gorbachov, who had half-awakened from his sleep and was stirring under his groundsheet, broke the silence. "Snakes?" he boomed in his harsh baritone.

"Yes, snakes. Just that," insisted Remeshkov. "Snakes—adders—everything."

"I'd have done for the lot of 'em, muttered Gorbachov, his words muffled by the groundsheet over his head. He cleared his throat noisily, yawned with gusto and fell silent.

"What d'you mean?" insisted Remeshkov.

"I'd have strangled the whole boiling of 'em. That's what I mean" growled Gorbachov, trying to find a more comfortable position on the boxes. "You can't scare me with your old wives' tales."

"But there were dozens and dozens of them crawling all over her. Your're just boasting."

"Who the hell ever heard *me* boasting? As for your snakes, I'd have grabbed them and squeezed the guts out of them. Wouldn't you?"

"Don't bring me into it. I'm only telling you," protested Remeshkov.

"And who told you to tell me? Is that what they taught you at school?"

Gorbachov, still with his head under the ground-sheet, again cleared his throat sleepily. When no answer came he turned on his side, eased his tight boots, and soon his breath was coming deeply and evenly. He was sleeping as only a strong, healthy man can sleep.

"A strange story, that," commented Novikov unsmilingly. He recalled how Remeshkov had fought his way through to Ovchinnikov's guns with him, and he did not wish to offend the man. "Yes, a strange, interesting story," he said. Then, getting to his feet, he added: "When the line's through to brigade, tell me. I'll be at Number 2 gun."

A shell from a tank-borne gun exploded just to the right of the gun-pit.

Only when he was alone, on his way to Alyoshin's gun, could Novikov give his undivided attention to the gravity of the situation. It was clear that the battle that had been raging in Kasno for two days had reached a critical stage in which even a slight advantage either way in man-power and fire-power would decide the fate of the town. And the Germans in this sector had that vital advantage. Their force had been strengthened by the contingents that had escaped from Rivny and had retreated after the morning battle to the forest with many of their tanks unscathed, to lie in wait not far from his gun positions. What he had seen in the hollow on the way to Ovchinnikov's guns told him that the Germans would demine the field and thus give themselves a clear route to the lake—and to his own gun positions. But what puzzled him most was their slowness in making an all-out attack. However hard he tried, he could not guess what would happen before daylight came—or within the next hour, or the next minute. Meanwhile he could not bring himself to believe that Kasno would fall and that the Germans would force their way into Czechoslovakia. That was a more horrible prospect than the prospect of having to

sacrifice his men, the men with whom he had fought his way to the Carpathians.

Number 2 gun stood on the northern slope of the height.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Captain Novikov."

Novikov made out the figure of a man getting to his feet beside the shield of the gun. The moonlight threw silver streaks on the groundsheet cape thrown over his shoulders and the tommy-gun slung across his chest. As he stepped nearer Novikov exclaimed:

"Alyoshin? What the devil are you doing here, on sentry-go?"

"I sent the men to the dug-out to get a bit of sleep, Comrade Captain. They kept hanging around the gun like ghosts and I got furious at them. So I packed them off to sleep."

Novikov smiled despite himself.

"Ah, Victor, at a time like this it's up to the men themselves whether they sleep or not. An officer playing sentry is the last thing to make them feel easy in their minds... Send one of your men here and stop upsetting them."

"Right, Comrade Captain," answered Alyoshin, pushing his cap to the back of his head and shedding the groundsheet as if he were feeling too hot. "Why is Fritz so quiet?" he went on. "This waiting gets on our nerves. I hope the bust-up comes soon."

A rocket soared up from the infantry trenches ahead of them, hung motionless in the still, blue air, fell rolling on the minefield and spluttered out without bringing any machine-gun fire from either side. The two men sat down on the gun-trail, and in the diffused light from the pink glow in the sky Novikov saw that Alyoshin was looking at him with unblinking, wide-open eyes. There was nothing of the usual stale smell of tobacco and army clothing about Alyoshin, nothing but a pleasant mixture of smells with a suggestion of chocolate, mint-flavoured biscuits and fresh, boyish sweat. The soft, homely odours so contrasted to Novikov's anxious meditations that they turned his thoughts to Lena and brought back to him the warmth of her trembling fingers.

"What are they messing about with these rockets for?" asked Alyoshin impatiently. "This cursed waiting! Honest, Comrade Captain, when the fun starts I bet you'll have to chalk up five tanks to my gun. Won't you?"

"Five at least, Victor."

Novikov felt a wave of tenderness mixed with pity rising within him. Alyoshin, he told himself, had not yet lost the innocent spontaneity and impatience of youth; he could not, or would not, realise what lay in store for them. Even

Novikov found it difficult to foresee exactly how things would develop and what would happen to him, his men, his guns and Lena.

"I forgot to tell you—I gave Lena your chocolate. She sends her thanks, says she loves chocolate. Did she?"

"Sent her thanks, repeated Alyoshin eagerly. He rubbed his forehead, broke into happy laughter and went on: "How is she, Comrade Captain? Feeling better? You said she refused to be sent to hospital. Good girl!"

"Yes, but I'll be sending her to the dressing-station tomorrow. Perhaps tonight. Depends on what blows up."

They fell silent. Another rocket flew up, casting a pale light over the minefield. A shadow passed over Alyoshin's face and his lips tensed.

"If it isn't a serious wound, don't send her away, Comrade Captain. After all, she's almost a doctor herself—went to a medical institute. She knows all about dressing and bandaging wounds and all that." His words came in a confused rush and he leaned towards Novikov pleadingly. "If she's sent down the line she'll never come back to us. You know that yourself. She'll be sent to some other unit when she's recovered... Comrade Captain, you don't think I sent that chocolate for myself, do you? She never spoke to me except in a friendly, cheerful way. I did it for you. She spoke to me about you and she said that she might come to hate you or else leave the battery. That was just a lot of nonsense about hating you. She said it in anger, because you'd never say a word to her."

"Send a sentry here and go and have a rest," said Novikov with a severity of tone that surprised Alyoshin. He got to his feet and adjusted his holster with his usual quick movement. "Change the sentries every two hours."

"Right, Comrade Captain," answered Alyoshin in a subdued voice. He jumped up hurriedly, and his movements as he adjusted his holster were an almost exact copy of Novikov's. Novikov noticed this, just as he had noticed that Alyoshin's voice when he was giving orders had the same inflections as his own. He realised with a twinge of annoyance that this copying came from Alyoshin's hero-worship of himself, and that the copying was confined to purely external things—those things that first caught the eye and, for some reason, the fancy of others, as he well knew from his own experience. But in his own case these characteristics had taken shape by themselves, quite apart from any intention of his own. It was simply that at a very early stage in his life, at a time when Alyoshin was still boyishly immature, he had found himself in a position of responsibility.

He imitates me, thought Novikov with amused affection, because he sees me as his senior both in years and experience, and thinks of me as the ideal officer whom he must emulate. But he doesn't know that in years there is precious little difference between us, doesn't know that we often think about the same things and that my only experience is the experience of war. I, too, would love to gobble chocolate at times, or take a turn at sentry-go, or boast about the tanks I'd knoked out. But I've just no right to do that. And I suppose my behaviour under fire seems to him the highest kind of bravery. Oh, Victor, Victor, one day after the war, if we both survive, I'll tell you all these things, and I bet you won't believe them! And yet it's true. It's simply that you've stayed young and that I've had to shoulder responsibility for the lives of others.

"Well, good night, Victor," he said and shook Alyoshin's hand with a firmer grip than usual. "Or perhaps it won't be such a good night—but we'll take it as it comes."

"Oh, what the hell!" answered Alyoshin, flicking the peak of his cap with his forefinger. "Anything instead of this passive warfare!... And give Lena my love."

On his return to Number 1 gun Novikov wakened Gorbachov and told him to try to make his way into the town, get in touch with brigade headquarters, or, at least, learn what he could about the situation there. The gunners had not yet settled down to sleep; they were lying on the ground-sheet listening to Novikov's orders to Gorbachov. The glare over the town had fanned out wider and every detail of their position—the men's faces, the gun, the ammunition boxes—stood out clearly. Behind them the battle was raging as fiercely as ever and they could feel the ground shaking under their feet. Flares of different colours—each one meaning something to somebody—soared up against the glowing curtain of haze. But from the German positions on the far side of the minefield not a sound came. It seemed as if Novikov's men and guns were being squeezed in the jaws of a vice—on the one side the inferno of glare, on the other side, the brooding silence of the German positions in which men were planning, calculating, deciding the hour at which the attack would be launched—an hour that Novikov could not even guess at.

Keeping his voice casual with the hope of lessening the tension among his men, Novikov said: "Well, I think, I'll go and snatch some sleep... Remeshkov, give me a shout if anything happens."

"Right, Comrade Captain—but it beats me how anybody can feel like sleeping just now."

As Novikov stepped inside the dark dug-out the smell of damp straw that enveloped him felt almost tangible. He stood by the door for a time listening to his own breathing and the loud beating of his heart. Then he called softly: "Are you asleep, Lena?"

"I'm here—waiting for you. Come to me... What's going on outside?"

Guided by her barely audible whisper that reached him through the pitch darkness, he made his way to the bunk.

"Don't light the lamp... We're cut off, aren't we?"

"Lena, you can't stay here any longer. You should be in some quiet place—that mansion in the park would do. I'll carry you there. There's no sense in your staying here."

"Now then—don't frown. I can tell by your voice that you're frowning. Don't worry about me. All I want is to have you beside me. I'll be much better if you are with me."

"And I feel exactly the opposite."

"Strange! No, it's not so strange. I understand why you feel that way. Why are you still standing there?... Yes, I see why—we're like two people in a railway station. Ah, well, it's got to be like that... Take off your coat; you'll feel better. You must be dead tired... When you left I said to myself: 'He'll be frowning when he comes back—if he comes back.' But you did come back. That means you love me—just a tiny bit." Her words dissolved into warm, happy laughter, the laughter that Novikov used to think of as lustful and as out of place in an atmosphere of dirt and gunpowder fumes and sweat and blood.

The fact that Lena, who had once been so brusque and hostile to him, had now revealed her love and that he himself had been so irresistibly drawn to her had wiped out of existence that earlier, boyish love that had seemed to him like a pinpoint of light at the end of a long avenue of years. And what had this earlier love amounted to?—a dimming memory of the smell of damp trees in a park, sand-strewn walks, sunburnt legs and white sandals below a cotton dress, a bicycle leaning against a fence, clear grey eyes smiling over a glass of lemonade at a wayside booth—then snow falling noiselessly in the light of a street-lamp. Just that, and some letters in his breast pocket—four letters and not even a photograph.

As he was taking off his coat his hand brushed against the breast pocket of his tunic and he heard the rustle of the letters. He felt that he was severing a link with something that belonged to his childhood, but the call of the present was stronger, more precious and vital in his life as an adult. It was the first time in his life that he had heard and felt this call.

"Lena," he began in a voice that choked with emotion. "Lena, please believe me—never in my life have I felt about anybody as I feel about you." He sat down on the bunk by her side unseen and unseeing in the shared darkness. "Believe me, Lena. Never before, in all my life!..."

He put his arms around her. Without speaking, without raising her head, she stretched up and pulled him down to her. Almost fainting with his new-found happiness, he felt the warmth of her breasts under her tunic: the breath of a faint whisper brushed his cheek; her slender fingers caressed his hair and gently, lovingly stroked his neck and shoulders.

"Don't spare me! Don't spare me! Remember how short is our time together, how soon I'll have to go. Do what you wish with me."

"Now!... Now you can send me to that hospital. Whatever happens from now on, I am yours—and you are mine, all mine."

She was lying, all warm and relaxed, embracing him with tired arms, kissing him not greedily but with calm, gentle kisses. There was the gentleness of exhaustion, the mute acceptance of all that might happen to them in the way she pressed against him, in the way her fingers stroked his forehead and his hair. But, so soon after this momentous turning-point in his life, this seemingly unrepeatable ecstasy of possession, he could not bring himself to believe what she had said about going to hospital, about being parted from him tomorrow, perhaps even tonight. He was overwhelmed by the horrifying senselessness of her wound, by the sudden but belated fulfilment of their love, by the blind forces of chance that had thrown them together.

Trying to discern her face in the darkness, Novikov listened to her whispered words in silence. Never before had he felt so bitter a sense of loss, so swift and sudden a blow of irrevocable injustice. Half-rising, he kissed her weakly moving lips, her soft eyebrows, her prickly eyelashes, and, with an attempt at brisk livelines in his voice, told her:

"You are *not* going to hospital, Lena. I'll not let you out of my reach. You'll go to the dressing-station, no farther. I'll arrange for you to remain with our brigade. You're my wife—and everybody will treat you as my wife... So no more talk of hospital."

"Your wife," repeated Lena slowly. "How wonderful you made it sound! Your wife!" But after a brooding silence she added bitterly: "Your wife? At the front there are no husbands and wives."

"I don't want any delay; it's got to be made quite clear... When any of my men, even my officers, are sent down the line, I can never get them back. Not one of those I started with in Stalingrad are with me now."

Lena did not reply. She kept her head pressed against his shoulder, warming him with her breath and inhaling the fresh, healthy smell of his young body and the strong, familiar smell of gunpowder that still clung to his clothes after the night's battle. She lay without stirring and he felt that she chose silence rather than give voice to thoughts with which he could not agree.

"You don't answer me, Lena," he said in a voice hoarse with emotion. "But to me it is all clear."

"Please try to understand me," she pleaded. "Everything can change—everything... It is too much happiness to be with you—so good that it scares me. You may say it's nonsense, but sometimes when you're happy you begin to fear everything. I'm frightened for you—and for myself."

Carried away by his feelings, he threw his arms around her. "It *is* nonsense, Lena," he said gently. "Nothing will happen to me. I've felt that in my bones all through the war. So please stop thinking about it."

Without speaking, she stroked his neck and shoulders. After a time she whispered pleadingly: "Put your arms round me. Hold me... so that it hurts..."

A loud explosion, a crackle from the roof-beams, a sharp shout from the gun-pit and the noise of running feet in the trench outside made Novikov jump up. He put on his coat quickly and fastened his belt with its heavily-laden holster. More explosions followed, and particles of earth streamed down upon him from the roof. A hoarse voice—Remeshkov's or Stepanov's, he could not tell which—came from outside: "Comrade Captain, quick! The Germans!—"

The words jerked him back into reality. He leaned over Lena, who was now sitting up in her bunk in silence, and, without kissing her, told her: "Well, it's started. I'm going," and hurried out of the dug-out.

A jumble of impressions crowded into Novikov's mind as he stepped into the trench—the glare over the town now paling in the early morning, the mauve expanse of sky over the misty, ragged line of the Carpathians, the fresh, cold smell of the earth, the round, sleepy face of Stepanov, the moon melting like a transparent piece of ice in a sea of green. But nothing of this could divert his attention from another sight that met his eye.

The outskirts of the pine forest, into which the Germans had retreated the previous day, still lay in the pools of dark-

ness left by the receding night, but spurts of flame were coming from the darkness and Novikov could make out the black bodies of tanks rolling forward and dividing into two distinct streams—one heading towards the leaden sheen of the lake and the height where Ovchinnikov's silenced guns lay, the other, across the minefield towards his own positions. What he saw in this hurried, first glance amazed him not because the attack had been so long delayed but because there was something new and baffling in the method of their advance.

The night, as yet only lightly touched by approaching dawn, filled the hollow to its brim and screened the advancing tanks from his view. It was only from the harsh clanking of the tracks, the sudden burst of sparks from the exhausts, the red tongues of flame from the gun-muzzles and the chorus of strained, metallic noises as of some mighty machine gradually working up to its full power, that Novikov could picture in detail this new line of attack upon the height where his guns stood.

Two signal flares rose simultaneously from two different points on the forest's edge. Behind him, apparently from the tanks that had forced their way through to the outskirts of the town and had bombarded his positions during the night two answering flares soared into the sky as if to say: "We're breaking through—we'll join forces in the town."

The shadowy tanks were now advancing over a wide front, the bushes disappearing under their tracks as if monstrous animals were grazing across the land. Unhesitatingly, almost contemptuously, they lumbered across what Novikov still thought of as the minefield although he saw now that the Germans had made a thorough job of demining it.

"Don't stand there gaping, Stepanov. To your post—at the double!" rapped out Novikov when he saw the gun layer standing in the trench nervously rubbing his fleshy cheeks, ducking occasionally and gazing with hypnotised eyes at the shellbursts churning up the ground beyond the fire-line. Novikov could make no sense of Stepanov's mumbled reply and he repeated his order:

"To your post—at the double!"

As he watched Stepanov running clumsily towards the gun, his big head tucked so deep into his shoulders that his coat collar pressed into his ears, Novikov asked himself angrily: What's come over him? He used to be so calm and collected.

Novikov himself was forced to duck a couple of times as he ran after Stepanov. Splinters from shells exploding close at hand flew low over their heads and even the ear could

tell from their curious singing note how sharp and ragged and death-dealing were those flying shards of steel. It was strange, Novikov thought, that he had never before noticed how insidiously musical those messengers of death sounded.

At the gun-pit men, their faces a dirty grey from lack of sleep, were hurriedly bedding down the gun to the new line of fire. Porokhonko, coatless, was deepening the hole for the trail-spade with powerful blows of a pick, and was shouting angrily at Remeshkov who was levering a log under the trail. Porokhonko turned for a moment to Novikov, who noticed that his eyes were ablaze with the joyful, revengeful relief of one whose long-awaited hour has come. That one glance set a glow of satisfaction running through Novikov's body. Whipping off his greatcoat and throwing it on the parapet, he shouted: "All to your posts—load!"

Novikov noticed, too, that on Remeshkov's face, with smears of gun-oil across his unshaven cheeks and white eyebrows, was a look of blind, savage urgency as he rushed to the gun and slammed the slippery shell he was carrying into the breech. Without a pause he swung back to the ammunition box, grabbed another shell and, nursing it lovingly against his body, raced back to the gun as if the ground were burning under his feet.

"And so a gunner is born!" thought Novikov, and as he watched the movements of this new Remeshkov he felt that he need not reproach himself for his harsh treatment of the lad in the past two days.

"Comrade Captain, will you take over the sights?... You or me, Comrade Captain?... Or Porokhonko?" asked Stepanov in pleading, uncertain tones, moving unwillingly towards the gun. There was a tinge of blue in his pale face and it seemed as if all his former confidence and sureness of movement had been squeezed out of him. His usual keen-eyed alertness had been replaced by a lifeless, shifty look that disgusted Novikov although he realised that Stepanov had been crushed by the night-long ordeal of waiting and that urge for self-preservation that gripped some soldiers like a disease now that the end of the war was in sight.

Novikov seized Stepanov by the shoulder and turned him round. "What's wrong with you? Get a grip of yourself. If you don't, the first shot will get you." Accompanying his words with a sharp push on Stepanov's shoulder he ordered: "To your post!"

Stepanov crouched by the sights and grabbed the hand-weels convulsively. In the rigidity of his back and the clutching tenseness of his hands, Novikov could picture the jerky passage of the target panorama.

"Let me take over, Comrade Captain. I'll..." Porokhonko's words were drowned by rounds of tank shells that plunged into the ground behind them.

The horseshoe formation of tanks was now spreading out wider on both sides of the height. The arm nearest to the lake seemed to be making no effort to reach the remains of the pontoon bridge but was skirting Ovchinnikov's guns and making for the hollow where yesterday's rescue party had fallen foul of the Germans. Obviously the enemy now knew that Ovchinnikov's guns were no longer a danger to their tanks on No Man's Land. The central curve of the horseshoe was now bending inwards, making an added threat to Novikov's position as it advanced. The second arm was thrusting forward in a flanking movement towards the town and Novikov could make out the dark, shadowy shapes of the tanks as they cut across the highway.

From the two ends of the horseshoe signal rockets rose into the air. From the hollow came a continuous roar of motors and caterpillar treads: but, to Novikov's astonishment, there was no concerted fire from these massed tanks—only random shots as if the Germans were patiently probing for targets.

Novikov rushed over to the telephonist's niche in a trench-wall and called. "Get Alyoshin on the line!" While he waited he thought with unforgiving resentment: If only we had Ovchinnikov's guns to count on just now! That path by the lake—uncovered by our guns! He clutched the receiver and called, "Alyoshin?" but before any answer came his ears were torn by round after round of artillery fire followed by a regular pattern of shellbursts. He straightened up and saw to his right a succession of purple flames—it was some battery close at hand firing at the advancing tanks. Another pattern of sounds caught his ear—from their dug-in positions the tank-borne guns had opened fire on the enemy.

Novikov had no lines of communication with his neighbours on either flank and did not know how much of their striking force had been lost in the recent engagement; and now the sudden realisation that these guns were alive and throwing all their weight into the battle sent thrills of joy coursing through his veins. With a broad smile on his face that astounded the telephonist, he shouted into the mouthpiece:

"Alyoshin! You see that your right flank is alive and kicking?... Good! Leave the right column of the tanks to them, and fire at the left column. Don't let them near the lake—give them all you've got! That's all."

Returning to Number 1 gun he gave the order: "Aim at the left column. Pick off the leading tanks."

The exchange of signal rockets had ceased; all the tanks were now clear of the forest and every part of the horseshoe formation had now joined in the attack. All this he could see without his field-glasses.

The three leading tanks of the left column suddenly changed course and were now rolling thunderously over Ovchinnikov's height. The first tank crushed through the low breastwork of Number 3 gun-pit and with a screech of tortured metal swung round and crushed the disabled gun into the ground. As it turned, its side made a clear reddish patch in the growing light of dawn and Novikov barked out the order to fire.

As the shell went screaming through the air at its target, followed almost in the same instant by a round from Alyoshin's gun, a column of fire shot up before his eyes, a sharp pain pierced his ears and the ground seemed to give way under his feet. He felt himself being driven hard against the ground and a blast of hot, choking air swept his cap off and tore at his hair. Dimly aware that the pale-faced telephonist was stretching out a hand to recover his cap, Novikov struggled to his feet, shaking his head in a vain attempt to end the agonising ringing in his ears. Around him the shell-craters were still wreathed in smoke. Spits of flame, pointing straight into his eyes, came from all along the narrowing half-circle of advancing tanks. The height on which his two guns stood now seemed to have been levelled off and even the gun close at hand appeared and disappeared in the all-embracing haze. He could not make out whether his men were at their posts; all he could see was a pall of darkness cut through with tracer shells from the tanks' guns.

"Stepanov!" His loud, anxious shout wracked his temples, but it brought no answer.

What met his gaze first when he reached the gun were the dilated eyes of Remeshkov who was crawling between the gun-trails obstinately clutching a shell to his breast with one arm and choking with the smoke. He caught Novikov's eye and nodded his head towards Stepanov who was on his knees by the gun-shield. Porokhonko was tugging at Stepanov's belt and shouting at him.

"What's up?" shouted Novikov. "Why have you stopped firing? Is Stepanov all right?"

No one answered. He bent over Stepanov and, only dimly realising what it meant, saw that the gun layer in this kneeling position had his forehead and shoulder leaning against the gun-shield and that he was slowly slipping down.

His cap was still on his head, held in place by the pressure against the shield. A fold of his fleshy neck bulged over the collar of his tunic and the rim of sunburn gave his skin a strange appearance of life, but the dark, viscous stream that was oozing from under his cap and the two gaping craters so close to him told another story.

"Carry him to the corner of the gun-pit. We'll bury him later," said Novikov in a subdued voice, recalling with pain the harsh words he had spoken to Stepanov so short a time ago, but realising he had neither the time nor the strength to decide whether he had done wrong in speaking as he had done. His head was spinning and he felt a wave of nausea—a touch of shell-shock, he thought. He repeated his order in the same subdued voice and added, in his usual commanding tones: "And then to your posts." This seemed to wipe out of his mind all that had happened a few seconds ago. With renewed confidence in his luck he returned to the gun and pressed his eyes against the rubber eyepiece of the sights that still retained the living warmth and damp sweat of Stepanov.

Through the sights he saw that the horseshoe formation of tanks had now broken into two parts. The tanks were keeping up a heavy fire as they crawled away from their centre to form up again in black masses. The three leading tanks of one group had already passed Ovchinnikov's guns and were rolling clumsily down the slope into the hollow.

Expelling his breath in a long drawn-out "A-ah!" he pressed the release and the gun's recoil sent a shiver of angry exultation through his body. The correlation of his hands and his eyes seemed to be something apart from his consciousness, and he kept saying to himself: Don't hurry! Don't hurry! Remember—you never hurried! Nothing in the world existed for him except this panorama framed in the sights, and once again his reaction was almost automatic when the broad, sloping shoulders of a tank showed themselves at the intersection of the crossed wires. The tank's long barrel jerked and the flash from its muzzle blotted out everything else from his vision. Just to his left a column of earth rose with a thunderous roar. At the same moment he glimpsed his target again and fired, but could not follow the trajectory of his shot or see the burst of blue flame that marked its direct hit on the broad chest of the tank.

"Look out, Comrade Captain! Messerschmitts overhead! Duck!"

What's all this shouting about? Novikov asked himself vaguely. Whose voice is it—Remeshkov's?... Now, then, Remeshkov, none of that! Quiet! Quiet!... And I mustn't

hurry—mustn't hurry. Steady does it... How many rounds have I fired?—six?—ten?—twenty? No, only nine. Why couldn't I see where my shots went?... The tanks are still coming on. "We've bagged thirteen, Comrade Captain!" The shout from behind him now penetrated his consciousness. It was Remeshkov calling, but never before had he heard this savage, exultant note in Remeshkov's voice. "Thirteen of them blazing, Comrade Captain... No, it's fourteen now! Six to us, three to Alyoshin and—" Suddenly the shouting took on a new tone. "They're diving, Comrade Captain, coming straight at us."

Through the roar of bursting shells Novikov heard from overhead a sharp, whistling note. He looked up and saw flights of Messerschmitts diving through the smoke straight towards him, their machine-guns spitting out darts of flame. Their bombs were raining down on the infantry trenches, sending the earth flying up in twisted columns. He felt his gun shuddering under his hands from the vibrations of the bomb-bursts.

His ears rang with the shrill note of the planes as they flattened out from their dive, and, as they regained height and wheeled round, the crosses on their wings stood out boldly. Once again he could see the angry stabs of light from their machine-guns, and streams of bullets spattered along the breast-works and set the empty shell-cases ringing. Bombs fell all around his gun and a hot blast of air struck the back of his head. Novikov felt no sense of danger and he made no effort to seek cover for himself, although he noticed that his hands had stretched out instinctively in a protective motion to cover the gun-sights.

"Take cover, Comrade Captain!" Again Remeshkov's desperate shout held no meaning for him. "Take cover! They're out to get us. They'll kill you—what'll *we* do then?!"

The warning shout bounced off him. He felt the reassuring firmness of the ground under his feet and the possibility of a direct hit never entered his mind. With calm eyes he watched the slim fuselages of the Messerschmitts as they wheeled round before returning to the attack.

Competing bravely against the roar of battle, the buzzing of the field-telephone caught his ear. "The 'phone' " he shouted, but already the telephonist was calling excitedly to him: "It's Alyoshin. He says the tanks on the right have passed through the minefield."

Straightening up, Novikov looked over the gun-shield and saw a number of tanks rolling towards the infantry trenches. The men had left the trenches and were rushing towards him, stopping every now and then to turn and fire

their tommy-guns. Through gaps in the smoke he could see them zigzagging up the height, falling, getting up again and continuing their headlong rush away from the advancing tanks.

There, thought Novikov, goes the last of our infantry cover!

"Call Alyoshin!" he shouted over the mounting roar of the plane engines. "Tell him to swing round and cover the infantry's retreat. Start with high explosives against the tanks."

While the telephonist was relaying his message he turned and again looked over the gun-shield with a feeling of impending tragedy. Men were still running up the slope. But almost instantly shells from Alyoshin's guns started bursting between the running men and the advancing tanks, sending up a wall of spraying earth and smoke. This, it seemed, brought the men to their senses; they halted, then began rushing back to the nearest trenches.

"Comrade Captain, take cover! They're coming at us again!"

Novikov felt a violent tug at his sleeve. Remeshkov was crouching by his side gasping for breath, his upturned face grey and begrimed. In his wide-open, staring eyes were reflected the stabs of light that warned of approaching danger from the skies. A metallic roar enveloped them and a cloud of dust stirred up by the bullets shimmered over the parapet. A dark shadow flashed low over their heads and, looking up, they saw the receding tail of a plane that had swooped past them and was now zooming up into the sky.

"Are you all right, Comrade Captain? Are you hit?" Remeshkov kept repeating, wiping the dust from his sweating face. "Are you hit? Why don't you take cover?"

Without heeding to Remeshkov's outpouring of questions, Novikov stood up by the gun-shield and took in all the details of the scene before him—the tanks rolling on past those that had been knocked out, speeding down towards the hollow and on towards the lake, their progress helped immeasurably by the air-cover of the Messerschmitts. Novikov's eyebrows were jerking convulsively with the strain, and Remeshkov, who from his lower position could not see the advance of the tanks and could not guess at Novikov's anxieties, pressed closer to him and repeated anxiously:

"Are you all right, Comrade Captain? Are you hit?"

"To your post—load!" ordered Novikov. As he got into position at the sights he added: "Where's Porokhonko? Still alive?"

Porokhonko was lying on his back between the gun-trails, chewing violently on a straw and gazing angrily at the evolutions of the Messerschmitts.

"Fire!" ordered Novikov.

As on the previous morning, a thick cloud of smoke hung over the battle-field, and it was only from the tracer trails, the clanging of caterpillar treads and the roar of hard-driven engines that he could guess at the movements of the tanks along the shores of the lake.

The high-pitched note of Messerschmitts cleaving the air above him and the scream of bullets all around him did not exist any more for Novikov. As he fired round after round his nose and throat became raw with the fumes of burning paint and the barrel of his gun seemed to have become coated with a luminous blue. He cleared his mind of everything except the thought of those tanks that were skirting his positions and trying to force their way to the lake.

"They're skipping off!" An exultant shout from behind him made Novikov lift his head. High in the sky planes were shining like silver fish in the morning sunshine. As they sped towards the western horizon the air was criss-crossed with tracers from plane to plane and from earth to sky. It was only from this lattice-work of fire and from a wavy trail of black smoke that a Messerschmitt was leaving in its wake that Novikov realised a "dogfight" was going on overhead—one of those episodes of war that always leave earthbound observers unable to understand what is going on.

Again Novikov scanned through his sights the moving mass of tanks on the rim of the hollow; again he shot off round after round, stopping only for a second to wipe the acid sweat from his eyes. Again his ears were deafened by a chorus of roaring plane-motors. But there was a new note in this roar; it was the deep-throated roar of fighter-bombers that poured out of the sky. Before he had time to spot the planes, Novikov was on the point of cursing them when he heard Remeshkov shout:

"They're ours! Our Ilyushins! Here they come, Comrade Captain... Just look at them—look at them! Aren't they beauties!"

Remeshkov, his shirt soaked with sweat, was standing between the gun-trails in a litter of spent shell-cases, clasping a live shell to his breast and laughing with a joyous, sobbing laughter. His head was thrown back and sweat was streaming down his muscular neck. Porokhonko, too, was craning his

neck skywards, but one hand was groping on the ground—probably for another straw to chew—and there was a look of cynical disbelief in his narrowed eyes.

Flight after flight of Ilyushins were skimming low over the Carpathians from the east and massing for the attack. From the infantry trenches rose a series of red rocket flares to indicate the line of the enemy positions. The attack planes wheeled round—and it seemed that the fighting on the ground had been suddenly frozen into immobility.

As he watched the first attack planes diving on the German tanks, Novikov thought: Well, here it is—a breather, and maybe the last we'll get... And Lena? Only a dozen steps away! I've time to take her out of here to some safer spot, to the mansion. She's there—waiting for me. I've no right to forget her... No, she was never out of my mind.

"Porokhonko!" he shouted. "Take over here. I shan't be long."

He swayed uncertainly as he walked over the splinter-torn earth to the dug-out. It seemed that a hot mist enveloped him and he was scarcely aware that the trenches and the defence-works around his gun had been almost levelled off. Crater overlapped crater, thick layers of soft earth had been sprayed over the footways and the tops of the parapets and paradoses sliced off as if by a huge spade.

He paused just inside the door of the dug-out, sweat-soaked, blackened with smoke and dust, reeking of battle. He tried to speak, but the words seemed to choke in his throat.

Lena was sitting up in the bunk. She was fully dressed, even to the belt with its tiny holster in position. She was gazing down speculatively at the newly-bandaged leg that hung over the bunk and it seemed to Novikov that he had arrived just when she had been on the point of getting to her feet.

Making a step towards her, he said in a hoarse voice:

"Lena, I've come for you... It's time to go."

Without speaking she lifted her head and smiled up into his face, caressing him from the depths of her eyes. She stretched out her arms to him, kissed him with tender understanding on his lips that were rough and bitter-tasting with powder-smoke. Then, in soothing, reassuring tones, she said:

"Well, that's that! I'm ready—ready for the dressing-station, or the hospital, whatever's best and quickest... But just a moment. You're sweating like anything. Things were pretty hot out there, weren't they?"

She took a piece of cotton wool from her medical kit and, with the care she displayed for the wounded, dabbed his cheeks and chin and then, more gently, the scar from yesterday's bullet above his right eye. As he stood by her, feeling her light touches on his face and acutely aware of her nearness, no words came to him; he was afraid that they would catch in his throat. He realised, too, that after his ordeal at the gun, after the orders he had shouted over the noise of battle, his voice would be hoarse and harsh and not his own. And in that voice he could not explain anything of what he felt for her.

CHAPTER 14

In the park of the mansion Novikov found a driver from the wagon-lines and sent him off on horseback to locate the brigade's dressing-station with all speed. He spread a groundsheet over a heap of leaves and made Lena as comfortable as he could. They were both silent, listening to the mounting roar of the attack planes and the rattle of machine-guns from beyond the hill on which stood his two guns. They watched the attack planes as they wheeled low, their fuselages gleaming in the sunshine and the roar of their engines filling the park.

Deep in thought, Novikov gazed through the transparent screen of the leafless trees at his gun positions only a few hundred yards away. He thought of his men there, his men whom he had passed while he was carrying Lena in his arms, and recalled his own tense feelings when he saw the surprised but understanding look on their faces. Remeshkov had called out: "Good luck, Lena. Get well soon. We all love you—every one of us," and Porokhonko had added: "We'll meet again, if we come through this alive." No one had shown any disapproval—no one had that right, he told himself—of what he had done, not even the sharp-tongued Porokhonko. They had all shown their kindness of heart, the same kindness that he had so often repressed in himself and had never shown to Remeshkov or Porokhonko or any of his men, whom he loved. How often he had frowned on any show of gentler feelings!—he was too young and had seen during the war so much unkindness, so much of human sufferings that fate had imposed upon his generation. He had never asked himself whether his men loved him or what it was in him that they loved. At times he had been harsh to them as he was to himself. All those things that could make life wonderful in time of peace—selfless kindness, love, sunshine—he put off until after the war. And now, faced

with the inevitable parting from Lena, so soon after this whim of chance had thrown them together, he was oppressed again by the blind, senseless cruelty of life. Although her wound was not serious he knew that, when, no one could foresee how the battle would develop, it would have been utter folly to keep her near his guns.

With a ring of conviction in his voice he told her: "Whatever happens, whatever it costs, I'll find you. I swear it. If you go only to the dressing-station or if you're sent down the line, I'll find you. You must believe that we'll meet again."

"No," said Lena, smiling sadly and turning her whole body towards him, her hair brushing his cheek. "No, you won't find me, Dmitry."

"I'll find you... I love you. I realised that too late."

She looked up at him with shining, tearless eyes. Lightly she ran her fingers over his forehead, his eyebrows, his cheeks, as if to engrave his features on her memory. Then her head drooped; she shut her eyes tightly and the tender oval of her chin, her eyebrows, her nostrils, the corners of her lips started trembling. Recovering herself a little, she raised her head and, suppressing her sobs, said quietly: "There will be many women in your life yet."

"But I already have you in my life. What other women could there be when there is you?" he said in a strange-sounding voice. He seized her in his arms and pressed upon her weakly responding lips the bitter kisses of farewell. Shaking her gently by the shoulders, he told her: "I must go. My time is up... And never forget—I'll find you wherever you are. I'll find you."

Novikov rose to his feet. Lena was gazing at him with unseeing eyes, silent and biting her lips. He found that he could not tear himself away from her. Her neck in the loose collar of her tunic, her soft hair, the shoulder-straps on her thin shoulders, the curve of her cheek, were caught in the pink glow of the cold autumnal dawn that was gaining an ominous hold of the park and everything that surrounded this fenceless, hunched-up figure on the groundsheet. Yet it seemed for a moment that in this tiny corner of the world war had no existence, that here there was nothing but a rosy morning of autumn untouched by the explosions and the roaring of tanks on the farther side of the height.

Sunbeams streaming through the avenues of centuries-old lime-trees fell on the heaps of damp leaves, and the jagged edges of glass remaining in the windows shone like burnished gold. A light mist was hanging over the pond in the calmness of dawn. Here, in the cold pure air of a new

day laden with the smell of dew-bathed autumnal leaves, everything spoke of peace, the enduring, eternal peace of nature.

"I must go, Lena, I must go," Novikov kept repeating in a lifeless voice, still not believing that he would have to leave her there in a world of her own that had suddenly been torn apart from his own world.

"Wait!" said Lena, in a voice that had recaptured some of its strength. "Just a moment more... Look! Your sleeve is torn. What was it, a splinter, or a bullet? Didn't you notice? Let me mend it. Take off your tunic. I'll be quick—it won't take a minute." She turned suddenly with a gasp of alarm to the hill and added. "Someone's coming for you... I'll mend it right away and get a driver to take it to you... Your tunic, Dmitry—I'll mend it."

A man was running towards them from the guns, waving his arms and shouting, but his words were drowned by the shells bursting all over the smoke-covered slope.

"Yes, he's calling me."

Novikov was only dimly aware of taking off his tunic and Lena laying it down by her side; but he was bitterly conscious that in these last moments no words could come to his lips and that something inside him made it impossible to kiss her farewell.

Still looking at her, he took a step or two backwards, then turning sharply, he set off at a run along the avenue over the rustling leaves. His eyes were screwed up to narrow slits and there was nothing he could do to banish the choking feeling in his throat.

As he ran up the slope Novikov could not at first make out that it was Alyoshin who was approaching. The young lieutenant was pouring with sweat and blackened with smoke, and his blue eyes shone with an unnatural brilliance. There was a big rent in the skirt of his begrimed great-coat. As he neared Novikov he gasped:

"My gun-sights are smashed... Two men wounded... The tanks ran off the path and the mines got some of them. They're circling to our right... Armoured troop-carriers have joined them... But my sights, my sights! I ran to get Ovchinnikov's sights, but they were broken too. What can I do without them? Curse my luck."

Alyoshin's boyish face was distorted with anxiety and he gritted his teeth to restrain his sobs. Swaying uncertainly on his feet he wiped his face with the sleeve of his coat.

"Fire without the sights, Victor. Aim along the barrel," said Novikov and, giving Alyoshin a gentle push, added: "Come on! No time to be lost."

Streams of tommy-gun fire from many directions were racing across the slope, crossing and recrossing in a close network pattern.

As he leapt down into the gun-pit Novikov saw Porokhonko kneeling between the gun-trails with a shell cradled in his arms. Then he noticed Remeshkov, his teeth bared, leaning against the parapet firing the light machine-gun. His shoulders were shaking with the recoil and his cap, unheeded, was slipping gradually off his head. He was either sobbing or laughing with anger and through clenched teeth he kept muttering: "Oh, no you don't!... No you don't!"

Everything in front of the height seemed a mass of flame and thick black smoke that was scored with tracer tracks. A group of heavy tanks that had gathered on a slope of the hollow had evidently been hit during the bombing and collided and were now interlocked in one mass of flames. There was no longer any trace of the tidy, horseshoe formation: dotted all over the terrain were the wrecks of tanks from which came spirals of oily smoke and flame. But to the right several tanks were still moving jerkily, trying to skirt the hill on which Novikov's guns stood. To the left, blunt-nosed armoured troop-carries were rolling down into the hollow and Novikov could make out the small figures of Germans rushing towards the bushes, firing as they went and making no effort to take cover.

So that's what they're up to, thought Novikov. They've poured out of their armour-plating, but they're out to kill, not to be killed—to wipe out anything that bars their way through the town and on to Czechoslovakia. *Us, in fact!* Remeshkov's words came back to him: "Oh, no you don't!... No you don't!"

The firing, from both tank artillery and small-arms, had reached a new peak of intensity. The rain of bullets and the spouts of flame, smoke and earth from the shell-bursts now seemed to cover the whole height and Lena realised that the battle, far from having fallen into a lull after the planes' attack, had risen to a higher pitch, had reached the point at which everything was caught up in the turmoil—everything but the solid ground underfoot.

How is Dmitry faring? Lena asked herself anxiously. Ah, but nothing could happen to him. I've seen him in action and no one can fight like him. Nothing can kill him... But now the shelling's worse than ever. What's happening to him?

Her trembling fingers could not control the needle and she laid the tunic down by her side. Biting her lips and gazing with such grim intensity that her eyes ached, she

stared at the gun position which kept appearing and disappearing in the clouds of smoke and fountains of tortured earth. Every now and then she saw, or thought she saw, the patch of white of a tunicless man. Yes! Surely that's Dmitry by the gun!... Quick! Quick! Let's have an end to this battle. It mustn't go on! Please, please, let it end soon.

A blinding flash of orange flame shot up from the gun positions, followed instantly by a deafening roar. Dense clouds of smoke billowed up and rolled down the slope, obscuring the whole hill-side. They were scattered and thinned out by the early morning breeze, and Lena was paralysed with horror when she caught a fleeting glimpse of a patch of white lying where it had been thrown over the edge of the parapet. Her mind fought furiously to reject the first terrible impression that came to her. Could it be? No, *he* could never be killed or wounded! It must be someone else.

A new sound reached her ears, a high-pitched howling that seemed to have its origin near the outskirts of the town to her left; and overhead she saw fiery-red comet-tails streaming across the sky above the tree-tops. As rivulets of fire struck the ground, clouds of smoke again blotted out the view and obscured that patch of white lying over the parapet. What could this be? she asked herself. Our Katyushas? But why are they firing there? They think he's dead—but he *can't* be dead. Stop! Stop! You're firing at him... the enemy tanks are over *there*. He's alive—alive!... And me? What is left for me?... No, he's not dead... Am I all alone now?

Again the wind swept the height clear of smoke and again she saw the patch of white on the parapet. It had not moved. She looked down at the tunic by her side, its sleeve still unmended, and her last shred of hope died. She seized the tunic that still retained the smell of his living body and buried her face in it. Burning tears streamed from her eyes and through choking sobs she kept shouting something, pleading for justice.

The soft midday sun of late autumn was streaming down on the town when Major Gulko learned of the death of Captain Novikov. The stone-paved streets, scarred and torn by caterpillar treads and covered with broken glass and spent cartridges, caught the rays of the sun. The houses behind their wrought-iron railings were burning themselves out and only thin ribbons of smoke arose from them. High over the charred trees in the orchards, the clouds, strangely

summer-like in their wispy texture, were dissolving in the sunshine. All these things, and the fact that the telephonists were dozing at their instruments and that Major Gulko was in his slippers and tunicless, spoke of peaceful, everyday life, but Alyoshin could not restrain his tears.

The young lieutenant stood at attention before his brigade commander. He was newly shaved—or perhaps his boyish face had just been well scrubbed—and the freckles stood out plainly on his pale, hollow cheeks. His coat was new and his collar-lining snow-white. Heedless of the tears that streamed down his face, he gave the account of Novikov's death in a flat, emotionless voice—a voice that made him sound ten years older despite the boyish gesture of brushing away his tears with the sleeve of his brand-new coat.

"Captain Novikov—that boy! No, I can't believe it. It just can't be." Major Gulko was almost shouting, and he banged the table with such force that the pencils lying on the map jumped about. He turned his face to the wall, his red-rimmed eyes brimming with tears. A choking cough came from his throat and his wide, ugly nostrils quivered. Clearing his throat, he went on: "Back to your post. Take over the battery. Go at once. The brigade is pulling out in half an hour. Our tanks are already in Marice—*in Marice*, do you hear?"

On his way across the town to the dressing-station Alyoshin was joined by Gorbachov who had been waiting for him at a street corner. Nothing, it seemed, could break the stillness that had descended upon the town. Everything conspired to create an atmosphere of uneventful, everyday life—grey Katyushas lined up beside houses that had escaped destruction, ambulances clustered under the shadow of maple-trees at the side of a sun-filled street, a field-kitchen smoking in the court-yard of a house, and the voices of the soldiers gathered around it. But this stillness bore down upon Alyoshin like an insufferable burden. Never in his life had he felt so alone.

The courtyard and orchard of a large house that served as the brigade's field dressing-station were crowded with ambulances and stretchers, and it took Alyoshin some time to locate Lena. She was lying on a stretcher, pressing a thin, pale cheek against the rolled-up tunic that served as a pillow. Spasms of pain twisted the almost transparent skin of her forehead and it seemed as if dark shadows were passing across her face, reflecting the thoughts that tortured her mind. Alyoshin's voice came dimly to her ears, bringing

Over 140,000 Soviet soldiers died liberating Hungary.

back to her something near and familiar. She opened her eyes but neither by look nor word did she greet him. Only her fingers moved slightly, in a gesture more of good-bye than of recognition.

"Lena dear. I've come to say good-bye. We'll never forget you—none of us will ever forget you. Good-bye and good luck, Lena."

She did not know how long Alyoshin and Gorbachov remained there by her side. She was only dimly aware of her surroundings and she felt as if she were sinking slowly into water, wishing that no one would take any heed of her, that no one would disturb her. She heard only vaguely the sounds around her, footsteps going through the orchard, the rustle of coats as medical orderlies stepped over her on their way to other stretcher-cases, the whisper of wind in the grass and in the withered leaves that fell weightlessly upon her and got entangled in her hair. From close beside her came the sound of sobbing and a pleading cry for water.

Who is that, moaning? Can't he bear the pain? Does he know what *real* pain is? Biting her lips and retreating into her own thoughts, she strained her memory to recall all that had existed for her before Novikov's death—his voice, his quick movement as he adjusted his holster, his face, smile.

She opened her eyes and gazed up through the naked branches of the apple-trees which seemed to go right into the low streaky clouds that kept changing their tints. Where does this light come from? she thought. What does it mean?... But what does anything mean—the air, the sky? Now that he's gone, what meaning is there left in anything?

"What a glorious day! Isn't it beautiful! How peaceful, how unbelievably peaceful everything is!" The words, uttered in a rough, tobacco-hoarse voice, jerked her agonisingly back to full awareness. Even then it was only with part of her mind that she understood what this harsh voice was describing so beautifully. She turned her head and looked almost with hatred at a grey-haired man in a stained white overall who was leaning against the door-jamb, pulling hard at a cigarette and gazing at the trees and the sky. She turned away as if in self-protection and pressed her cheek against the rough cloth of the tunic. Through her tears she looked at the nearest stretcher from which the moans were coming. A young, flaxen-haired Czech was tossing about in delirium and clawing his bandaged chest. There were drops of sweat on the soft down of his upper lip. He was muttering brokenly as if panting out some urgent message, and every now and then Lena could hear the words "Water!—Water!"

Lena propped herself up on one elbow and groped for her water-bottle. Her numb fingers refused to obey her will and it took her some time to remove the stopper. Fighting to master the sobs that shook her, she put the bottle to the lad's lips and through her tears she saw how eagerly he drank.

"The pain will pass", she whispered. "Bear it—it will pass."

She lay down on her left side, the side from which came her pain. Again she pressed her cheek against the rough cloth of the tunic, biting into the collar to choke a cry.

1959

This article by Ilya Ehrenburg is dedicated to Franco-Soviet wartime cooperation.

ILYA EHRENBURG

4 October 1944

(*An Excerpt*)

...Word did not come from Paris, but the Russians knew that Paris was alive and fighting.

We were liberating the cities of the Ukraine and Byelorussia. In the distance I could see Paris, grey and pink at the daybreak hour, and I knew that in liberating Kiev or Smolensk or Gomel that we were setting Paris free too. All the officers knew this, all the Red Army soldiers. You couldn't count the people who had befriended Paris, there were too many of them. Maybe they had never seen this beautiful city, but they were its friends nonetheless, loving as they did freedom and beauty, courage and good cheer.

Often I would question the German prisoners, with fresh copies of the *Pariser Zeitung* in their pockets. They would complain, "Paris is no longer what it was... The French don't like us..." And hearing their sighs, I was proud of Paris.

It was gratifying to see fields and roads strewn with corpses of invaders: this very division had stood on the outskirts of Paris. Our soldiers would talk about it. "They won't be setting off for Paris any more." We were fighting for our land, but we did not forget about Paris.

We found photographs on the German soldiers, dead and alive. Arrogant and vacant-looking, they had been taken in Paris, next to the Eiffel Tower like the Führer. Dead they lay scattered on our land. Alive they trudged to the prisoner-of-war camps, scratching and whimpering. I don't know exactly which Allied division was the first to approach Paris, but I know something else: the number of German divisions destroyed by the Red Army. There were thousands of kilometres between Moscow and Paris, but Moscow aided Paris.

We knew that Paris had not surrendered. We knew that Paris was fighting back. We saluted its heroes with our guns;

we crushed the invaders. We knew that words could not help in such appalling circumstances. We were not trying to make the Nazis see reason, we were killing them. Perhaps that was the only way to make them see reason. That is why we celebrated the liberation of Paris as a victory for all, a victory that the Red Army had also taken part in.

There were people who did not have faith in Paris. Or perhaps did not want to? Maybe they thought that Paris deserved not just masses said for it, but funeral orations too? Maybe they thought that Paris could be turned into an enormous Monte Carlo? These blind people did not know Paris. One Russian officer told me, "Paris isn't a champagne cork—one bang and that's it, like many people think. No, it's a huge, slow-acting bomb that will blow up yet..."

"The bomb exploded. Those August days entered history. Paris surpassed itself, and in Romania, the Carpathians, on the Vistula and in Latvia, the Red Army triumphed. A Russian soldier put it well when he told me: "When we learned that Paris had driven out the Germans we were as delighted as if our dearest friend had come back to the company..." For us the liberation of Paris was the return of an old friend.

And there's something of my own I want to add. I am glad that I have lived to these days. I can remember June 1940 calmly now. It has been erased. It's as if I'm strolling the streets of this city so dear to me, meeting friends and talking to the grey stones and small boys. Waking in the morning, I can tell myself: what joy that we all have Paris back once more!

ILYA EHRENBURG

28 November 1944

(An Excerpt)

The Heroes of Normandie

Many will grow thoughtful on learning that two young Frenchmen were made Heroes of the Soviet Union—the highest title of honour now conferred in Russia. It is not just a matter of brave people wearing medals, it is the moral of history that matters. I won't begin to ask if the Vicompte de la Poype ever thought that his son might be made a Hero of the Soviet Union. But I would like to know if ordinary French people, at the time of Munich deal, thought that the good relationship between our peoples, apparently broken by slander and distrust, would be sealed with blood and become invincible. Conferring this high honour on two French pilots was more than the just recognition of two brave flyers, it symbolised a friendship between two great peoples.

I want to cast back once more to the arrival of the first group of Normandie pilots, numbering among them Marcel Albert and Rolland de la Poype. It was the autumn of 1942. We are now in Hungary and East Prussia but at that time the Germans were on the Volga and in the Caucasus. The decision to set up a French air force unit to fight in Russia had been taken not long before, in the summer of 1942. At that time the Germans were making swift headway to the east. Oh now, of course, it goes without saying, that Soviet Russia has no shortage of friends. Stalingrad, after all, is behind—it's all cut and dried. Everyone likes to be on the winning team. But we can tell the difference between friends in misfortune and people who come at the sound of victory salutes. An embattled France was with us in the summer and autumn of 1942—before the Balkans, the Nieman, the Dnieper and Stalingrad. That was when the Normandie pilots came to us. I remember being with them and listening

to the first radio reports of our winter offensive on the Don. Then they took part in the huge-scale operations at Orel, Smolensk, on the Berezina and the Nieman. The point, of course, was not the numbers involved—what was the significance of a group even of the most skilful and courageous pilots in gigantic battles, where millions clashed with millions? What mattered was the friendship, that impulse of the heart more precious to a people than any speeches or declarations. What mattered was the blood spilled on Russian land. Russia will never forget that Frenchmen, pilots from Normandie, came to us before Stalingrad.

Neither will France forget that we valued and recognised her before the liberation of Strasbourg and Paris, at a time when many in the world were saying "Paris is finished". There were no such doubters amongst us. We believed in France when there were yet neither partisans nor an army. We knew that France would live again, that she would be great and free. We did not test her out, we did not belittle her, we did not put her on trial. We are young, but we know history. We know for instance what Valmy* means. We believed in France as we believed in freedom, and this France will not forget.

*Austro-Prussian forces were defeated by the French at Valmy in 1792 (*Tr.*).

SERGEI SMIRNOV

The Russians in Rome

Sergei Smirnov (1915-1976)—Soviet writer and war veteran, Lenin Prize winner. He devoted many years to a search for unknown heroes of the Great Patriotic War (*Tales of Unknown Heroes*, 1968; *Heroes of a Great War*, 1970, and others). He reconstructed literally piece by piece the defence of the Brest Fortress in June 1941 (the book *Heroes of Brest Fortress*, 1964). He uncovered many events of the war, including the involvement of Soviet citizens in the Resistance movement in Western Europe.

Anglo-American troops entered Rome, the Italian capital, on June 4, 1944. Engines roared and tanks thundered and clanked in streets spilling over with people.

Suddenly a cry of astonishment and delight went up, borne from mouth to mouth through the crowd, in the area off Via Nomentana, a broad street in the north-east of the city.

"The Russians are in Rome! The Russians are here!"

It seemed incredible. Everyone knew that the Russians on the Eastern front were sweeping all before them. But surely it was just a little while ago that the Soviet Army was doing battle just inside the borders of Poland and Romania and in the forests of Byelorussia. How on earth could the Russians suddenly be in Rome? Had they made an airborne landing perhaps? But Soviet planes had not been spotted over Italy...

But again and again came the same cry, and the stream of people flowed down Via Nomentana to the intersection with Via 21 Aprile. The crowd filled the crossroads to overflowing and everyone looked at the three-story building on the corner, which had a bas-relief of three white elephant heads projecting from the pediment below the roof.

Those who lived in the area knew that the Embassy of the Asian Kingdom of Siam (now Thailand) had long been installed at Villa Tai, as the building was called. But for many months now it had been quiet, its shutters closed and inhabitants gone. The Ambassador of Siam had left for the north of Italy with his entire entourage. The Embassy's head-waiter alone had remained to look after the villa. He was a Russian émigré, a modest, retiring man of about forty, whom the neighbours called Alessio in the Italian manner.

To the neighbours' amazement Villa Tai now appeared to be overrun with people. Its shutters and windows were

all thrown open, and on the broad second-floor balcony twenty or thirty people were forming ranks. Dressed in different ways, with submachine-guns in their arms and grenades on their belts, they were evidently partisans. Russian speech could be heard, unfamiliar to the people of Rome. But there were also Italians up on the balcony, together with the Russians. And giving orders to all, like a commanding officer, was none less than Alessio, the Embassy head-waiter, whom however the Soviet partisans called something rather different. They called him by his code-name "Chervonny" (Ace-of-Hearts).

He uttered a command, the ranks on the balcony stood still, and a scarlet flag with a hammer, sickle and star—the State Flag of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—was hoisted up Villa Tai's roof-top flagstaff, unfurling in the warm wind. Immediately the partisans on the balcony burst all together into the song "Broad is my native land..."

The crowd broke into applause and enthusiastic cries in honour of the Soviet Union and Red Army. Right then and there the musical people of Rome picked up the melody. It rang out over the streets of Rome, softening the roar of passing US tanks, the officers in their turrets looking on in bewilderment at the Soviet flag which had appeared out of the blue in the centre of the Italian capital.

An hour later the US military police arrived in their jeeps at Villa Tai's gates. Siam was considered an ally of Germany and Italy, and the Embassy villa was on the list of buildings liable to confiscation. To the amazement of the officer there were two Russian partisans with submachine-guns standing at the gates. Chervonny came out to them and declared that the villa housed the headquarters of Soviet partisans and workers in the underground resistance operating in Rome and the surrounding area during the occupation and who the Anglo-American Command were obliged to put on full military pay and guarantee all necessities, in accordance with the agreement between the Allied Powers.

It remained for the officer only to excuse himself. With a smile he made a note on his list, saluted his Allies, threw them the usual "O.K." and flew off with his policemen.

Two days later, on June 6, the people of Rome saw the Soviet partisans and their Italian comrades again. By now there were more than fifty of them, marching in formation under the same Red flag. Now that the flag could be seen close up, you could tell that it had been made out of the national flag of Siam. The white elephant—the royal coat of arms—had been unstitched from the scarlet panel and the hammer, sickle and star neatly sewn on in its place. All

the Russians had red armbands on their sleeves, decorated with the letters USSR.

Their songs filling the air, the partisans marched right through the city, bound for the Vatican, the papal residence next to St. Peter's Cathedral. Pope Pius XII was holding a ceremonial reception on this day in honour of the Allied Powers that had waged war against Hitler. As the people authorised by the Soviet government had not yet arrived in Rome, the partisans from Villa Tai were invited to the reception as the representatives of their country. This may have been the first time in history that the Red flag of Lenin entered the stronghold of the Catholic Church, held aloft by the partisans. As it appeared the Papal Swiss Guard presented arms, rendering military honour.

The representatives of each of the Allied Powers gathered separately in rooms set aside for them in the Pope's palace. The Soviet partisans formed ranks with their Italian comrades. The Pope appeared, accompanied by two captains of the Swiss Guard. As he inspected the ranks of partisans he handed each one his picture as a keepsake. He even displayed some knowledge of the Russian language, at times using it to ask his guests, "What is your name?", "Where do you live?". He then wanted to know when they had escaped Nazi imprisonment.

"The first ones to escape did so as far back as October 1943," answered Chervonny.

The Pope thought for a moment.

"Oh, then the situation was far from clear," he said. "That means they did not escape to save their lives but to fight, to face death. Good for them! And they were so far from their native land. The Russians are a brave people! I am sure they will soon be at Berlin."

He asked how they had got to the Vatican and spread his hands in sorrow on learning that they had come on foot.

"Oh, poor people. What a long way to walk!"

And turning to the captain of the guard he ordered that two buses be made available to take the Russians back to Villa Tai.

As the partisans made their way on to the buses in the Papal courtyard, still holding their Red flag aloft, a song rang out over the Vatican:

My Moscow, my country,
You are most dear to me.[1]

Here in the Vatican the same Alessio Chervonny took command of them, just as he had done on the Villa Tai balcony.

In actual fact his real name was Alexei Nikolayevich

Fleischer. He had had a hard and complicated life. He originated from a Russian noble family whose foreign name had come down to them from Danish merchants. All the men of the family had been officers or generals since the time of Kutuzov[2]. A son of a lieutenant-colonel in the tsarist army, Alexei Fleischer was also preparing to become an officer. When the Civil War broke out he was a cadet at a military school in the Caucasus. White forces under General Wrangel[3] despatched the cadets first to the Crimea and then abroad. Thus, without it being his will, for he was still too young to decide his fate himself, the seventeen-year-old Alexei Fleischer found himself among strange people, away from his country and without any means of subsistence. For years on end he drank from the bitter cup of émigré life.

In Bulgaria he made bricks and was a miner, in Luxembourg he worked at a tannery. In France he worked as an excavator and machine operator on an overhead roadway. In Nizza he was a chauffeur, first for an Italian diplomat, then for a rich elderly American woman and then for an Iraqi prince. Then he settled in the Yugoslav capital, Belgrade, and worked there as a chauffeur for the Greek Embassy.

In 1941, as is well-known, Germany and Italy attacked Yugoslavia and occupied the country, shortly before Hitler's invasion of the USSR. The staff of the Greek Embassy were captured by Italian troops after trying to escape, and were sent to the Albanian port of Durazzo. The Greeks were soon allowed to return to their country, to Athens, which had also been taken by the Germans, while Fleischer, as a Russian, was kept in Durazzo. When war broke out on the east, he was offered return without encumbrance to Belgrade on condition that he sign up as a volunteer for the White émigré battalions that the Nazis were raising for the Soviet-German front.

Fleischer had long cursed the people who had removed him to a foreign land and deprived him of his own country. During his years of life as an émigré he had seized avidly on the news reaching him about the transformations taking place in the Soviet Union. He rejected the proposal indignantly. On the contrary, he was now intensely engaged in working out how to help his country in its fierce battle with the enemy, despite how far away he was.

He learnt from the porter of the hotel where he was kept as an interned foreigner that Albanian and Yugoslav partisans were already operating in the hills around Durazzo. The same porter helped him get in touch with them, and arrangements were made for him to escape to a partisan unit.

But he was forestalled. Someone informed the authorities of his intentions. He was immediately put on a boat under police guard and deported to Italy, to a small village in the Abruzzi mountains. There he wrote to friends from among Rome's Russian émigré community and they managed to extract permission for him to move to the Italian capital. Here he was obliged to register regularly with the police but had the right to hire himself out for work. He found himself as head-waiter at the Siamese Embassy. In 1943, when Allied troops landed in southern Italy and Hitler occupied the country, the Siamese Ambassador left for the north with his entourage to the residence of Mussolini's puppet government. Fleischer was left the keys to Villa Tai, entrusted to look after the property.

In Rome Fleischer had become friends with several patriotically-minded Russian émigrés. They too had been keenly feeling the events that had taken place in their homeland, and were upset not to be involved in their people's struggle at these hard times. Later Fleischer met many Italian Communists through them, people taking part in the underground anti-fascist Resistance in Rome.

It was just at this time, the latter half of 1943, that Nazis began to bring Soviet prisoners-of-war to work in Italy. They were made to dismantle equipment from factories that were being removed to Germany. Hitler had already sensed that he would not hold out for long in Italy. News came that there were already several camps holding Soviet officers and soldiers captive in Rome's vicinity. It occurred to Fleischer and his friends to help these prisoners escape, to arm them and either send them to the Italian partisan units or form independent groups of Soviet partisans. Moreover, Villa Tai would be the ideal place for the escaped prisoners to hide. It had diplomatic immunity by right and Fleischer was now its sole master. The prisoners could be concealed here until arms were found for them and they could be taken across to where the partisans were operating.

One of Fleischer's new friends was Renato Boro, a Communist and building contractor from Monterotondo, a little town 25 kilometres north of Rome. He worked on building sites in the capital and drove in every day by bus. Fleischer found out from him that a party of Soviet POWs brought to Monterotondo had already reached some mutual understanding with the local anti-fascists, by means of such words in common as "communist" and "Internationale". According to Boro the Soviet people had intimated to the Italians with gestures and mime that they wanted to escape and join the partisans. But no one in Monterotondo knew

Russian, and they had not managed to come to a definite agreement. Boro then took Fleischer to the distinguished Communist Pompilio Molinari, one of the leaders of the Resistance in Rome province. Molinari gave Fleischer's idea his enthusiastic approval and allocated some of his people to prepare for the Soviet POW's escape.

From then on all the operations of the Russian partisans and underground workers in Rome and the surrounding area were directed by the headquarters of the Italian anti-fascist Resistance, through Pompilio Molinari who provided Fleischer with both assignments and essential help.

Boro took Fleischer to Monterotondo and organised a secret meeting for him with one of the prisoners, Alexei Kolyaskin, previously a medical instructor in the Red Army and a powerful man, built like a Hercules. He promised to get a group of reliable and brave comrades ready to escape. Everything was agreed on, the Italian friends taking responsibility for what was to happen next.

On the night of October 23, 1943, fourteen prisoners escaped, with Alexei Kolyaskin and his friend Corporal Anatoly Tarasenko at their head. They took advantage of the fact that the German guard had got completely drunk that day—it was some kind of festivity for the Nazis. The escapees managed to pick off the sentry at the exit without a sound, and found themselves in a dark Monterotondo street, awash with autumn rain.

An Italian guide was waiting at the appointed place. Hastening along narrow streets, they got themselves beyond the outlying districts of the little town and into the hills. The guide took them to a deep ravine, densely overgrown with prickly shubbery. This was where they were to organise their future partisan base.

Suddenly the partisans stopped. Two Italian soldiers stood in the heart of the ravine. Immediately thoughts of betrayal, of a trap, flashed through their minds. But the soldiers bent over boxes which were placed next to them, took out submachine-guns and machine-guns and held them out to the partisans. They were Pompilio Molinari's people, who had prepared both arms and a supply of provisions for the escaped prisoners.

The latter nearly smothered their Italian comrades with hugs. Taking the submachine-guns and machine-guns, they felt themselves once more to be fighters, to be Soviet soldiers, even though they were hundreds of miles from their native land.

The first few days were spent in preparation, learning to use the unfamiliar foreign weapons, getting to know the

terrain with the help of their Italian friends and establishing communications with trusted people in neighbouring villages. Then they began military operations: they would walk thirty miles or so away from the base, organise subversion and roadside ambushes, attack autocades and small enemy detachments. More escaped prisoners joined them and the group expanded so much that it became hard, in a densely populated area, to hide and provide all that was needed. On consulting Molinari, Fleischer left one fighting unit headed by Tarasenko in Monterotondo and transferred a larger unit of partisans, commanded by Kolyaskin, south of Rome, to the area around the little town of Genzano and Palestrina, where they continued their operations. Soon there emerged a third group of partisans, the youth detachment. It was based in Rome itself, in the cellar and some of the rooms of Villa Tai, and its command had been entrusted by Fleischer to a Siberian, Pyotr Konopelko, previously a mechanic in the Red Army.

This detachment, made up of young crack partisans along with other small armed units housed by Fleischer and his friends in different parts of Rome, was to take part in an uprising on the streets of the Italian capital. It was being organised by the anti-fascist Resistance headquarters. However it did not materialise. The Nazi Command in Italy announced that if the partisans were to begin operations within the Eternal City limits, the German Army would fight them and the British-U.S. troops "like the Russians fought at Stalingrad".

Everyone knows that Rome is one of the most ancient and beautiful cities of the world with many historic monuments and treasures of world culture, which would have been badly damaged or destroyed during street battles. Hence the Resistance decided to forego the uprising and all the partisans in Rome, the Russians included, received strict orders not to carry out any military operations in the city. Konopelko's group had to sortie a considerable distance into the area outside the capital and once there carry out subversion and attacks on enemy motor columns. One of the most important operations of this group was the destruction of a bridge on the road from Rome to Tivoli, which ended in intense fighting with the Nazis, and where Soviet partisans battled side by side with soldiers from Italian detachments. Nightfall alone helped Konopelko and his comrades get away from crushing defeat and back to Rome.

Kolyaskin's group managed to carry out major subversion in the area around Genzano in December 1943. The

partisan group was given the task of reconnoitring and blowing up a German ammunition dump.

Kolyaskin, the group commander, decided to carry out the reconnaissance himself, and took a very brave and enterprising partisan with him, Ilyinykh. They got to the dump at night, found a convenient place in vineyards on a neighbouring hillside and kept watch all the following day. As it turned out just two sentries watched over the dump, changing guard every two hours night and day. Making their way towards each other, they would meet in the centre, turn around and move off once more. In short, the guard was not nearly as large as they had assumed it would be. Kolyaskin and Ilyinykh decided that there was no need to bring in the entire detachment, that the two of them could manage on their own.

They bid their time till nightfall, then crept carefully up to a corner of the ammunition dump. As soon as the Nazi soldier reached the corner and turned around, Ilyinykh came up behind him, threw his greatcoat over his head instantaneously and stabbed him with his dagger. The second sentry could not see the first one in the dark and Ilyinykh had acted without making a sound.

In a few seconds the Siberian soldier had pulled the dead man's greatcoat off him, put it on, pulled the sentry's helmet over his head, and picking up his submachine-gun, began to walk just like the dead man towards the second German soldier. The latter had not noticed anything, and turned around as usual when they met in the middle. Ilyinykh immediately sprang on his back and everything happened just as quickly and silently as it had with the first man. The guard had been eliminated.

There were also drums of petrol in the ammunition dump. Scooping it up in the helmets, the partisans poured it over the stacks of ammunition, boxes of shells and cartridges. Kolyaskin struck a match and both rushed headlong to escape into the darkness, striving to get a little further away before the explosion, while behind them flames of fire danced higher and higher.

They flung themselves down on the ground when they reached a ditch by the roadside. At the same time there was a mighty explosion that nearly lifted them off the ground. The ammunition dump no longer existed.

Meanwhile the underground workers at Villa Tai were enabling more and more prisoners to escape. Soon there were over one hundred and fifty escaped prisoners from the camps. It was not just a matter of plucking each prisoner from behind the wire, but of concealing him first of all in a

safe place, feeding and clothing him and, most importantly, getting him arms and ammunition. Of course the leaders of the Rome Resistance helped a great deal in all this, but its resources were limited and Fleischer and his friends were obliged to find ways to get hold of money, weapons and provisions scarce in occupied Rome.

In different districts of the Italian capital they established up to 40 clandestine apartments where small groups of Soviet partisans were constantly being hidden. The people who owned these flats were both Russian émigrés and Italian patriots who hourly risked their lives hiding Soviet people, feeding them and helping Fleischer in all his undertakings. Alexei Isupov, a well-known Russian artist who had studied under Serov, Vasnetsov and Korovin[4], had turned his studio into a clandestine apartment. On strict orders from his doctors he had left the Soviet Union for Italy in 1926, living in Rome and undergoing medical treatment there. (He died in 1957.) His studio was situated right opposite fascist barracks, but he always had three or four partisans in hiding, whom he and his wife cared for dearly and whom they were most sorry to see go when the time came for them to join their units. Several other Russian émigrés were to become Fleischer's active helpers: Alexander Sumbatov, Vera Dolgina and Kuzma Zaitsev. The latter withstood torture and horrific beatings at Gestapo but did not give away his friends.

The militant underground with its headquarters at Villa Tai was genuinely international. Dozens of courageous, selfless Italians, filled with hatred for fascism and love and respect for the Soviet Union, scorning extreme danger to themselves and their families, would hide Soviet partisans and escaped prisoners, sharing all that they had with them—they helped Fleischer come what may.

These were people from the most varied walks of life: Olivieri, a lawyer, Santini, an engineer, Loris Gasperi, a doctor, Giovanni Gaffi, a salesman, Andreano Tanni, a former captain in the Italian Army and Oscaro di Fonzi, professor of medicine. Luigi de Zorzi, a joiner and cabinet-maker and a Communist with a long record of service in the underground, worked at the time as a porter at a large block of flats. Luigi and his wife Cesarina hid groups of armed partisans in the attic of the block, and although they themselves lived half-starved, would give up part of their rations to their guests. Luigi was an active assistant to Fleischer and time and again carried out crucial missions for him.

The cellar of a bar on Cairoli Street, near Vittoria Square, had been turned into a secret refuge where at times several

dozens partisans took shelter. The bar was kept by Aldo Farabullini and his wife Idrana Montagna. Gestapo bloodhounds darted all around, people were rounded up in raids nearby, but nothing could stop these brave people. Their bar was one of Fleischer's most important secret apartments. At times Nazi soldiers would go drinking in the bar without any suspicion that Soviet partisans were tensely waiting, gripping their weapons, in the cellar below their feet. In the event of danger the owner Aldo Farabullini, who would serve the customers he hated with feigned jollity, was to give a pre-arranged sign by tapping on the floor, at which point the partisans were to burst upstairs, either to die in battle or to force their way out of the block to other places of refuge. Aldo and Idrana knew full well what would then be in store for them.

Now and then when it was quiet in the vicinity, the bar's underground residents would come upstairs and eat breakfast like ordinary customers. If a genuine customer appeared at such a time they would pretend to read the papers, sipping their coffee or eating a portion of macaroni. Sometimes tricky situations would arise, one of the partisans would be keenly appearing to be absorbed in his paper while holding it upside down.

On one occasion a slip of this kind nearly cost them dearly. Right next door to Farabullini's bar was a house owned by a man well-known for his fascist sympathies. On several occasions when partisans were sitting in the bar he came in for a cup of coffee unexpectedly and looked at them with excessive curiosity. Some time after he suddenly told Idrana in an insinuating tone:

"Signora, I think you are hiding someone in your cellar. Twice I've seen your customers reading their newspapers upside down."

Idrana turned cold with fear, but remembering her neighbour was a terrible coward, she realised how to answer him:

"That's not all by far, Signor," she confided, lowering her voice. "Bear this in mind: we've got so much dynamite piled up in our cellar that we could make smithereens of the whole quarter... If, of course, some kind of danger threatened," she added.

The neighbour went pale, paid quickly and left. Idrana spent the next few days in great anxiety but the risk had paid off: the neighbour put too high a value on his house to inform the Nazis.

There were other friends, just as loyal to Soviet people, in the small towns of Palestrina and Monterotondo—the

Botticelli, Pizzi and de Battisti families, Renato Boro, Lorenzo d'Agostino, Alfredo Giorgi, Severino Spacatrossi, Pino Levi Cavaglione and many other anti-fascists. The selflessness that these people were capable of can be judged by an incident involving Anatoly Tarasenko, commander of a partisan group.

He arrived one evening from Monterotondo to be given his next assignment by Francesco de Zuccori, leader of the local Communist party chapter, and stayed overnight at the home of Domenico de Battisti, a farm-labourer. Both Domenico's wife Amelia and their two little sons already knew the partisan well by now and loved him.

In the morning, when Tarasenko was about to return to his group in the forest, he found that a large German unit had been billetted in the area surrounding the house. There was already a guard at the door and the Germans could have entered the house at any moment. Immediately Amelia worked out what had to be done. She pulled Tarasenko into the room, got her husband's new suit and hat and made him change, and then gave him her three-year-old son Fausto to carry, having given her child some instructions.

Tarasenko went out into the yard, full of Nazi soldiers. The guard standing by the house was about to hail him but little Fausto pretended to be frightened, burst into tears and kept crying "Papa, Papa!", his arms wrapped around the partisan's neck. Thinking this was the head of the family, the German waved Tarasenko on: "Go on!" The partisan walked on amid the soldiers, carrying little Fausto. He took the child to his grandfather who lived not far off, and got back to the woods safely. Anatoly Tarasenko corresponds to this day with the child who saved him, now grown up and employed in one of Rome's publishing houses.

The partisans' attacks became more frequent and had increasing impact on the Nazis. With the approach of spring and summer of 1944 the partisan struggle in Rome province gained in momentum, the Soviet groups conducting operations in the closest contact with detachments of local Italian anti-fascists. When German troops began to withdraw to the north, Fleischer once more brought together Kolyaskin and Tarasenko's groups around Monterotondo to the north of Rome, on a command from the Resistance headquarters.

There Soviet partisans, together with Italian detachments, gave final battle to German troops on the retreat from Monterotondo on June 6, 1944. Partisan machine-guns unexpectedly hit a large enemy motor column point-blank. Of the three German tanks sent to rescue the column, two

were destroyed by hand grenades; one of them was damaged by Alexei Kolyaskin who had bravely entered into single combat with an armoured vehicle and was wounded in the arm.

The battle ended in full victory. More than 100 Nazis were killed, 250 were taken prisoner, the enemy motor column was routed and Monterotondo was liberated by the partisans. The Italian flag flew above the town hall.

After the battle the partisans returned to Rome, and together with their comrades from the underground—Russians and Italians—joyfully celebrated their victory at Villa Tai. Farabullini's bar was not forgotten either. All the walls of the bar were covered in writing. The Soviet people saved by the brave Italian patriots Aldo and Idrana had thanked them from the bottom of their hearts. Several years later Aldo and Idrana had carefully preserved these inscriptions, the bar itself was called "Partisan" and its advertisement cards described how the bar had hidden Russian partisans who had escaped from POW's camps.

The epic of Villa Tai ended with the arrival in Rome of representatives of the Soviet government. Under Fleischer 182 former Soviet prisoners-of-war, including 11 officers, formed up in the courtyard and were transferred to the person authorised to repatriate them. They all left for their native land. Most of them then fought the concluding stage of the war at the front, and some fell the death that befalls the brave.

And then, once the war was over, Alessio Fleischer himself had his cherished dream come true: he received Soviet citizenship and returned home. He settled in Tashkent, was allocated a good, new flat, worked there as a cartographer, and then retired to live in the town of Solnechnogorsk, in the environs of Moscow.

* * *

I first learned the story about the Russian partisans in Rome four years ago in 1960, from an article by Alessio Fleischer published at the time in *Literaturnaya gazeta.* Later, in Tashkent I met the main hero of Villa Tai in person, and began to correspond with him. In the ensuing years I have had to be in Italy several times whilst working on a Soviet-Italian film. Always, arriving in Rome, I have used the opportunity to meet with the people who were involved in those interesting events—Fleischer's friends and comrades-in-arms from the Rome underground.

I made friends with Luigi de Zorzi, the joiner and cabinet-maker and hardy old Communist, and with his wife Cesarina. Every time I am with this glorious family they begin to reminisce about their Soviet friends of the war period, and Luigi talks for hours about the bravery and courage of his beloved Alessio Fleischer, while Cesarina says with a sigh of how she would like to see her former "godchildren" whom she hid and fed, at times in their rooms, at times in the attic or cellar of their block. I also met the lawyer Olivieri, and the Palestrina men Severino Spacatrossi and Lorenzo d'Agostino, who now occupies the high post of city councillor in Rome municipality. I stood for hours on the corner of Via Nomentana and Via 21 Aprile, looking at Villa Tai with the three white elephant heads under the jutting edge of its roof and the balcony from which the Red flag of the USSR was once raised over the building. Now, just as before, there is a little plate to inform one that this is the Embassy of Thailand, and beyond the fence play dark-complexioned children with slanted eyes.

A little later, in February 1964, I finally had occasion to get to know the Farabullinis...

In the summer of 1964, in Moscow, I met four "Rome Russians" who had come together in Moscow: Alexei Fleischer, Alexei Kolyaskin, former commander of the partisan group at Palestrina, who had come from Ufa where he works as a livestock specialist at a stud-farm, and the "Monterotondo Siberians"—Anatoly Tarasenko, now manager of a storehouse in the settlement of Anzeba near Bratsk, and Pyotr Konopelko, the leader of the youth detachment at Villa Tai and nowadays a driver in the town of Anzhero-Sudzhensk in Kemerovo Region. The friends had come to Moscow to appear on a Central Television programme devoted to their wartime activity.

The whereabouts of almost twenty of the people who took part in these events is now known. Pyotr Ilyinykh, who together with Kolyaskin blew up the German ammunition dump near Genzano, and his friend Fyodor Korekovtsev work in collective farms in Novosibirsk Region. Sergei Sarzhin works as a carpenter in a collective farm in Yaroslavl Region, Ivan Loginov lives in Saratov, Vasily Yefremov in Kalinin Region, and Ilya Markov in Moscow.

They have all kept in touch with each other in recent years, corresponding with their Italian friends and invariably writing to Fleischer. Single and now no longer young, this alone was his family—his friends and comrades-in-arms in Rome's struggle against the fascists. As before, he continued in his own way to be "chief of staff of the Rome Russians"...

Gathering together, they spent hours remembering the white villa on the green Rome street, the ravine near Monterotondo, the grave of their fallen friends at Palestrina, and all the dangers, burdens and joys of those hard but glorious days. But most of all they remembered their Italian friends, the ardent patriots and anti-fascists who bravely and selflessly came to their aid at the hour of cruel fate, snatching them from behind the barbed wire of the Nazi camps, putting weapons in their arms and fighting with them shoulder to shoulder.

1964

VADIM KOZHEVNIKOV

Exploit

At the Misocco cemetery in Milan, between the box-shaped, dark-green columns of trimmed cypruses and the white marble statues, there are four graves behind a low wall of smooth red stone. Whenever you go there—in rain or bad weather—you will see fresh bouquets of red carnations in the glazed blue jars sunk into the ground.

On Sundays hundreds of people visit this corner of the cemetery: workers, fishermen, peasants, treading noiselessly, in their cord-soled shoes. They stand beside these four graves in respectful silence until some one of them raises a brown, sunburned hand and begins to speak. The words of the orator are obviously very forceful, because the Italian police in their black uniforms and white American helmets begin to retreat further away from blazing eyes and clenched fists.

If you ask any of these people who is buried here, they will look you calmly in the face and say:

"Our brothers."

... In January 1943, when things were going badly at the front for the Nazis, they brought a group of Russian prisoners to Milan. They paraded them through the streets in chains, barefoot, in rags through which could be seen dark, unhealed wounds.

The Nazis hoped that the dreadful sight of these men would cause the Italians to believe that Russia would soon be defeated. The effect was just the opposite.

The Russian prisoners walked down the streets with their heads held high and keeping strictly in line. Looking straight ahead, they sang a song which the Italians could not understand, but which was full of severe words. When a Nazi soldier wearing a fur-lined jacket struck one of the Russians in the face because he laughed as he pointed to a statue of Mussolini, carved out of a greenish stone as slippery

as soap, the Russian stepped forward and with both manacled hands knocked the soldier to the ground with such force that the manacles snapped, and his wrists, cut by the steel bracelets, turned red with blood.

Here, near the summer cafe Esplanada, there was a fight between the manacled Russian soldiers covered with wounds and the Nazi guards, assisted by the Italian police. The Russians fought with their feet and heads, and struck hammer-like with their manacled hands. Everyone saw how one Russian jumped onto the back of a guard, pushed him against a shop window and threw the whole weight of his body against him. Sharp shards of glass jutting out from the window frame sank into the guard's head and neck.

For many days thereafter passers-by fearfully avoided the marble paving stones covered with dark blood-stains. And at the spot where the last Russian soldier, bracing himself against the wall, had waged his last fight, there were deep imprints from his bare feet in the ice. Already then someone had left a red carnation in each of the imprints. The next day at dawn the police discovered a noose round the neck of Mussolini's statue, from which hung a board with the words "This is for the Russians".

The four Russians who were still alive were sent by the Nazis to dig a trench in a park which was the site of a powerful anti-aircraft battery.

This gun battery was well concealed by trees and sham structures made out of straw, under which were hidden the longrange ack-ack guns. That night American and British planes carried out an air-raid over the city. It was quite unexpected, and the Germans barely had time to bring out their guns from under their cover. Yet even so the ack-ack guns managed to bring down two American bombers almost immediately.

Then, however, the situation changed. The Russian soldiers threw down their picks, took off their shirts, soaked them in machine oil, set fire to them and threw them onto the pile of straw camouflage. The entire gun battery was lit up by the flames, and became an excellent target for the bombers. The Russians took hold of their picks once again, but this time not to dig the trench but to smash the sights on two of the guns...

The British and Americans were able to drop their bombs and return to base without suffering any further losses. This time the blow indeed struck a military target, lit up by the burning camouflage, and not, as often happened, working districts plunged in darkness.

Who knows, perhaps if this action had not been taken,

the architectural monuments of the city—St. Lorenzo, St. Satiro, or the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, where Leonardo da Vinci painted his 'Last Supper', or the La Scala theatre built in the 18th century to the design of Piermarini, or the famous Milan Cathedral—would have been reduced that night to ruins.

Russian soldiers took the fire on themselves here, in a foreign and distant country, as they had done in their own country, fighting for every foot of ground, inspired by great love for their country and great hatred for the enemy.

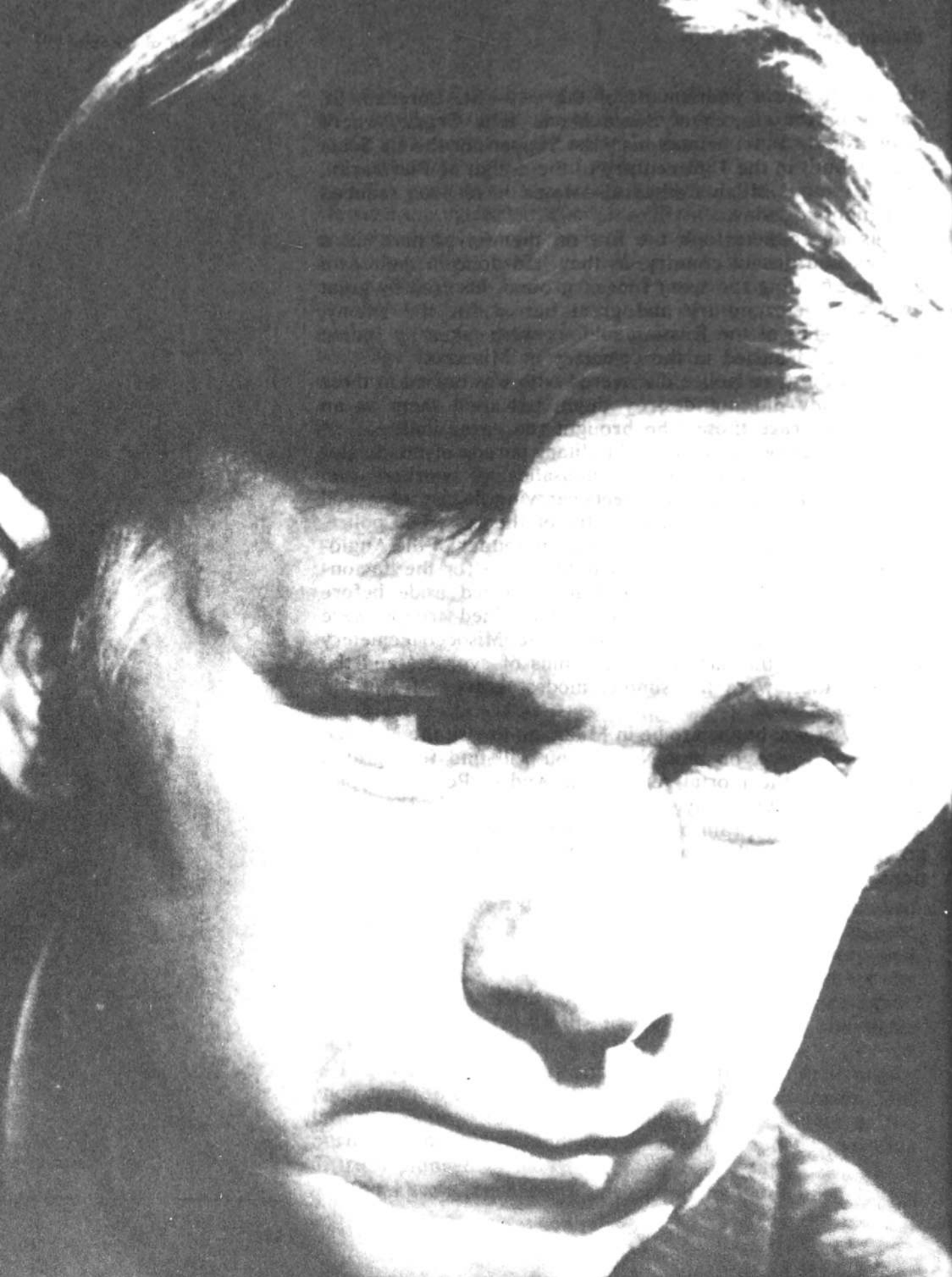
The bodies of the Russian soldiers were taken by Italian workers and buried in the cemetery of Misocco.

When the Nazi police discovered who was buried in these graves, they did not destroy them, but used them as an ambush to trace those who brought red carnations.

On the day of the triumphal military parade of the Anglo-American occupying forces, thousands of workers and peasants went out onto the streets carrying flags, and moved in organised columns to the centre of the city. The police, believing that this demonstration was in honour of the Anglo-American forces, hurried to clear the route for the demonstrators. However, the demonstrators turned aside before reaching the main square where the allied troops were drawn up on parade, and went to the Misocco cemetery where, amidst the dark-green columns of cypruses and the white statues, were the simple, modest graves of Russian soldiers...

If any of you happen to be in Milan, go to visit the Misocco cemetery. There, on plot No.16, you will find four graves in which lie the mortal remains of Andrei Petrov, Stepan Gavrilov, Semyon Chyorny and Vassili Veselovsky. And whenever you go, rain or bad weather, you will see by these graves glazed earthenware jars with bouquets of red carnations.

1948



VASIL BYKOV

Alpine Ballad*

(An Excerpt)

They reached the bushes at last but did not try to hide among them—they no longer had any need of a hiding place. Giulia climbed up the scree under a steep slope, showering sand and pebbles from underfoot and grasping the thorny branches with her hands; she got to the top of the pile and waited while Ivan, dragging his bad leg painfully, scrambled after her. At the steepest place, right under the edge of the cliff, he simply did not know how to get over the top, so painful was his leg. The girl knelt down and held out her thin, weak hand to him. He glanced at the blue veins in her forearm and made one more attempt to climb up unaided—how could she possibly drag him up? Giulia, chattering away in her peculiar mixture of Italian, German and Russian, took him insistentlly under the arm, steadied him until he at last pulled his heavy body over the edge of the cliff.

"Hurry, Ivanio, hurru! SS!" she repeated time and again in tones of fear.

The Germans were actually catching up with them, the most agile of them had already passed the grassland and were clambering up the slope; the others were trying to keep up with them. The madman, his hands tied behind his back, stumbled along at the end of the line with his escort urging him on. One of those in front saw the fugitives near the bushes and let go a burst of fire from his submachine-gun. The shots were echoed by the distant ravines. Ivan looked back—the Germans, true enough, were a long way away—and then strode on, almost falling over Giulia who was lying on the slope.

"What's the matter with you?"

"No, No! They no shoot!" She jumped up and looked back with a gleam of pleasure in her eyes. Her face glowed with a savage joy: "SS bastards!" she shouted at the Germans in a loud indignant voice. *"Verfluchter! Schwein!"*

Vasil Bykov (B. 1924)—Byelorussian Soviet prose writer, Lenin and State Prizes winner. During the war, on graduating from military infantry school, he served first with the infantry, then with the artillery.

Bykov's first stories appeared in the 1950s, but literary fame came with the story *The Third Rocket* (1962). This was followed by *Kruglyansky Bridge* (1969), *Sotnikov* (1970), *Hold Out till Dawn* (1972), *The Obelisk* (1974), *Sign of Disaster* (1983), and others.

In his prose Bykov depicts harsh, highly dramatic situations, exploring the moral basis of his character's actions in wartime.

The story *Alpine Ballad* is set in Italy, and describes the heroism and dedication of a Soviet soldier and an Italian girl who escape from a fascist concentration camp.

Vasil Bykov, *Alpine Ballad*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1966, p. 167-189.

"All right, drop that!" said Ivan. They had to husband their strength—what sense was there in calling them names?

Giulia, however, did not want to die passively—rage and the memory of all she had suffered from the Germans overcame all sound reasoning.

"Hitler *kaput*! Hitler *cretino*! Go on—*schiessen*!"

The Germans fired several more bursts but the fugitives were much higher up than their pursuers and, as Ivan knew, the laws of ballistics made it almost impossible for them to hit their mark. Giulia felt this, too—she was savagely jubilant when she realised that not a single bullet came whistling near them.

"*Nu, schiessen! Schiessen! Fascisti! Briganti!*"

She was flushed from running and from her excitement and her eyes gleamed with an angry black fire; her short thick hair was tousled by the wind. She had apparently exhausted her supply of swearwords and, picking up a stone from underfoot, swung her arm clumsily and threw it—it bounced from point to point, far down the hill.

Ivan was the first to climb up from the cliff. They managed somehow to scramble along the edge of the bushes, but the slope was becoming steeper and steeper. They were the very hell, those bushes—they would have been useful down below where they could have hidden from their pursuers, but on the hill they were a nuisance, they scratched them and their clothing caught on them. The idea of crawling through them was terrifying—their stiff, wirelike, resiny branches were so tightly interwoven. Ivan, occasionally glancing upward in alarm, sought the easiest route—there was no other way. Higher up another cliff with a scree beneath it awaited them and he realised that they would not be able to climb over it...

Giulia, however, did not see it and did not know it; she was busily engaged cursing the Germans, had fallen slightly behind and was now hurrying to catch up with him. He was out of breath and sat down on the stones, his wounded leg outstretched.

"Ivanio, leg hurt?" asked Giulia from down below him. "You give leg here."

In silence he got up and again looked upwards at the cliff; she looked in the same direction, saw the pile of loose stones and stopped.

"Ivanio!"

"All right. Come along."

"Ivanio!"

Her face was distorted as though from pain—she looked

back and saw the Germans following quickly behind them.

"Ivanio, we going to die! No Tereshki, nothing!"

"Come on, hurry, hurry up!" he shouted sternly; there was nothing they could do but turn into the bushes. Clenching his teeth he crept into that impenetrable, low-growing thicket that even wild animals fought shy of. Hundreds of sharp needles stuck into his legs, but he paid no attention to them, trying to protect only his knee; beads of cold sweat broke out on his forehead from the pain and the exertion. Undeterred by the thorns and the stones he crawled through the thicket in an effort to get round the cliff.

"*Oi, oi, oi,*" shouted Giulia in despair as she crawled after him and now and again stumbling over a branch and falling. He did not try to comfort her nor did he urge her on—he only looked back at the cliff edge where the Germans would appear at any moment.

This time the fugitives were lucky, they had almost reached the upper verge of the thicket before the first SS man appeared over the top of the cliff. He was dangerous now, because the difference in height between them and the Germans was very small. As soon as the German raised his head Ivan took a hurried aim and fired his pistol.

A dull echo rolled through the mountains.

Naturally he missed—the distance was too great but the German took the precaution of ducking down behind the cliff top; a long burst of submachine-gun fire followed. Tr-r-r-r—it echoed and re-echoed farther and farther through the mountains. As soon as the echo died away the fugitives hurried on. The sudden pistol shot had frightened the Germans and for some time no one appeared over the top. Then a striped figure appeared—Giulia saw him first.

"Ivanio! *Häftling*!"

The madman crawled over the edge of the cliff, his legs spread wide apart, and stood up swaying and shouting in his disgustingly hoarse voice.

"*Russe! Russe! Halt!* Why are you running away? They want to feed you."

"*Zurück!* Get back!" shouted Ivan.

The madman cringed timidly and moved back. Then they heard the Germans shouting at him and a little later they began climbing over the edge, all of them that were there.

The situation was rapidly deteriorating. It was only a short distance to the saddle where the thicket ended, but there they would be within range of Germans' submachine-guns. They had to stop the Germans at all costs and try to reach the saddle. Ivan dropped to one knee, thrust the barrel

of his pistol through the quivering branches of a bush, fired once, twice, three times. He then bent down and kept out of sight among the low bushes. By this time Giulia had caught him up.

"Ivanio, not all bullets, no *alles*."

He understood what she meant and touched her thin shoulder in his desire to pacify her—he would save the last two cartridges. He expected shots in reply, but the Germans were silent as they too, spreading out, crawled into the thicket. Then Ivan jumped up and, bending down so as to keep as much under cover as possible, went limping towards the saddle at the top of the slope.

The Germans had probably made a mistake when they also crawled into the bushes following the fugitives. The bushes not only impeded their movements, they prevented them from seeing their prey and from taking aim; while the SS men were struggling through, Ivan and Giulia made their way on. They got free of the bushes and, expecting to hear shots from behind them, ran, panting, to the narrow saddle and almost went rolling down the far side. From there Ivan took a good look round: on one side another steep stony slope similar to that behind them rose up under low-hanging clouds; right underfoot the slope led down into a hollow, beyond which lay another low mountain fold. Here and there white clouds, like flocks of sheep, floated overhead, and beyond them a solid curtain of grey clouds hid the snow-clad mountain-tops.

They were only just out of the narrow pass when Giulia dropped to her knees, crossed her arms on her breast and with her lips whispered some words very fast.

"What are you doing? Come on, hurry up!" he shouted.

She did not answer him but whispered a few more words, while Ivan, limping badly, ran downhill. She jumped up quickly and ran after him.

"Santa Maria will help. I ask her very much."

He was genuinely surprised.

"Drop that! No one will help you!"

He did not know which way to turn, he had not strength enough to climb higher, so he set off diagonally across the slope leading to the hollow. The saddle and the cliff behind still kept them hidden from the Germans. It was much easier to run downhill, their bodies went forward by themselves, the only thing was that their knees were giving way from fatigue. Ivan was quite unable to use his leg, so badly was he limping. Giulia ran ahead of him, but did not go too far and kept looking back. It seemed that their having got away from under the very noses of the Germans had excited the

girl. She looked boldly back at Ivan, chattering all the time, hopefully and joyfully.

"Ivanio, we going to live! Live, Ivanio! I very much want to live!"

"Oho," he thought. "It's a lot too soon to rejoice!" He looked back as he ran and saw the first German appear over the saddle. The man who climbed over the stones with difficulty was tall, he was wearing tight breeches, his tunic was unbuttoned and a white shirt showed through it. He was in no hurry to fire although they were not far from him and only a little lower down. He looked at them for half a minute, standing still, and then shouted something to the others coming up behind; then he burst out laughing. He laughed for a long time and shouted something to the fugitives. Then, instead of running after them, he sat down on a boulder and took off his cap.

Giulia ran up to Ivan and pulled at his sleeve.

"Ivanio, Ivanio, look! They good Germans, they let us go, they let us go! Look!"

Ivan could not understand why they did not shoot, why they had let them go and had themselves remained in the narrow pass. One of them went away to one side and waved his submachine-gun at them, shouting to them in German to run faster.

"Ivanio, Germans let us go!" exclaimed Giulia as she ran, suddenly joyfully excited. "We going to live!"

Ivan did not answer her.

"What's the trick? What have they got up their sleeves?" It all seemed unlikely to him and he was certain there was more to it than met the eye. The Germans had not given up the chase out of sheer kindness but more likely because they had something worse in store for the fugitives.

But what?

Ivan and Giulia ran right down to the very bottom of the hollow, pushed their way through the rhododendrons to the other side—there was a low, rounded bare slope on that side—and plodded weakly uphill again. The weathered sandstone and the short prickly grass hurt their feet, but they no longer felt the cruelty of the earth. Giulia ran ahead, then turned back and looked at the Germans. Her joy increased as they moved farther away from the Germans on the saddle. Ivan's troubled, gloomy look, however, soon attracted her attention.

"Ivanio, why you *furioso*? Leg, eh?" she asked him in worried tones.

"It's not the leg..."

"Why? We going to live, Ivanio. We got away..."

It seemed that he had already guessed what was wrong. He did not answer her, but limped hurriedly over the dome-like slope that dived suddenly downwards. It hid them from the Germans—that was good, but... They came out into the open and Giulia seemed to have guessed too, for she stopped suddenly. In front of them the mountains gave way to a broad empty space over which hovered a blue haze—below them lay a gloomy gully from which whirling tufts of mist climbed upwards to the sky.

With hearts grown suddenly cold they ran in silence to the edge and straggered back—the hillside broke off suddenly in a vertical cliff—below them was a misty abyss in which they could see grey patches of last year's snow.

Giulia lay crying on a stone ledge some five paces from the cliff edge. He did not try to calm her or comfort her, he sat down beside her, his hands pressed against the moss-covered stones, and thought. Apparently this was the end. In front and on one side there was the precipice, on the third side there was a steep, rocky mountain-side as high as the clouds and behind them in the mountain pass were the Germans. It was the perfect trap—just their luck to get caught like that! It was much too sudden for Giulia and was so tormenting after the hope of salvation that had suddenly appeared—and he did not comfort her, he had no words for it.

Bitterly cold damp came to them from the abyss and their heated bodies began to cool very quickly; all round them the wind howled among the rocks as if in gigantic funnels and it was cloudy and gloomy. But why did the Germans not come on, why didn't they shoot? They had all got together in the saddle, some sitting, others standing around the striped figure of the madman. Ivan watched them and realised that they were amusing themselves; they kept stabbing the *Häftling* with their lighted cigarettes—in the forehead, the neck and the back—and the *Häftling* with his hands bound was twisting like a snake between them; he spat and kicked at them, but they roared with laughter and again burnt him with their cigarettes.

"*Russe! Russe!* Help!" The whining shout of the German came to their ears.

This put Ivan on his guard—what had the swine thought of now? Why were they so merciless and inhuman to their own people and to others, to everyone? Was it only because of their mean spirit, was it really just for fun?

It seemed as if the Germans were waiting for something—only for what? Perhaps for help? Now there was nothing to fear, everything as Giulia would say, was obviously *finita*. His fourth escape was evidently to be his last. It was a pity, however, about that tiny human miracle, that black-eyed chatterbox, with whom happiness had been so intoxicating and so shortlived. Nevertheless he was grateful to chance that had sent him the girl in the last and most memorable hours of his life. Strange as it might seem, it was, after all that had happened, easier to die side by side with her than in the insatiable furnace of the crematorium.

It seemed that Giulia had cried her fill, her shoulders no longer trembled—she merely flinched now and again from the cold. He took off the leather jacket and, reaching out to the girl, carefully covered her. Giulia shook herself, made a tremendous effort, sat up and began rubbing her tear-filled eyes with her dirty, scratched fists.

"It's bad, Ivanio. Oi, oi, it's bad!"

"Never mind, don't you be afraid! I have two cartridges," he said showing her the pistol.

"Giulia no have *fortuna*. Giulia *finita*," she said in despair.

He sat motionless on the ground, watching the Germans intently, and everything inside him was raging from sorrow and helplessness. His conscience told him that he was responsible for her fate, but what could he do? If only the precipice were a bit easier to negotiate—but there was just that ledge hanging over an abyss, and behind it still another; the bottom was out of sight and there was not even the sound of a river. Then there was his leg—how could he keep upright on that steep slope? All this, taken together, determined their inevitable end.

"*Russe*! Help! Help!" came the weak voice of the madman.

Giulia saw the Germans at the top, rose up on her knees and brandished her tiny little fists.

"*Fascisti! Briganti!* Swine! Come and take us!"

The Germans on the saddle were silent, but soon the wind brought from there the sound of a voice dulled by distance.

"Hi you! We're going to kill you soon!"

"Come to prison. Leave the cold mountain, come to the nice warm crematorium," said another voice.

Giulia's face again turned red from uncontrollable rage.

"*Nimm! Nimm!*" She shook her fists at them. "*Komm! Nimm uns! Ha, Sie haben Augst, eh?*"

The Germans heard the words that reached them through the wind and one after another began yelling back indecent taunts. Giulia was beside herself with rage—she could not hold her own in such a verbal duel and could only bite her

lip. Ivan took her by the shoulders and pressed her close to him—the girl's head dropped obediently on to his chest and in her hopeless despair she wept like a little child.

"Don't do that. Don't cry. It's all right." Ivan tried clumsily to soothe her although he had difficulty in suppressing his own angry despair.

Giulia soon stopped crying and he held her in his arms for a long time, thinking gloomily how well everything had begun and how badly it was ending. He was the one that never had any luck, he must be the world's most unlucky being if he could not take advantage of such a favourable opportunity to escape.

Golodai, Yanushka and the others would have made a better job of it—they would have got to Trieste and would be fighting with the partisans against the fascists. And there he was, stuck in those damned mountains and had even allowed himself to be driven into a trap like a wolf. Probably he should have done what he set out to do—he should have set off the bomb and let others escape. But as it was... The worst of it was he had brought Giulia to her death, and she had believed in him, she had followed him and loved him... And that was how he had justified the hopes she had in him!

He pressed her tear-stained face to his breast and, despite the pain he was in, could feel her trembling hands on his shoulders. Again, despite their desperate situation, she evoked in him feelings of love that he had never been able to express in words.

Then Giulia sat down beside him and put up her hand to straighten her wind-blown hair.

"Giulia got short hair now. Never have long hair again, never!"

Ivan gritted his teeth in despair. His mind refused to accept the fact that death was inevitable—but what could he do? What?

"Ivanio," Giulia exclaimed, making a sudden recovery. "Let's eat bread—*mangiare*!"

She took the last piece of bread out of the jacket pocket and with a sudden burst of joy in her tear-filled eyes, broke it into two.

"Here, Ivanio!"

He took the bigger one and this time did not bother to measure the pieces and even them out—there was no longer any sense in it. They enjoyed the bread, the last piece they had intended to save for the Bear Range. Then Ivan felt still more acutely the inevitable end. The strange thing was that this last piece of bread seemed to him to be the last hope of remaining alive—by eating it they were rounding off the

cares of life so that the only thing that was left to them was to live the last few moments and die. Ivan was again filled with sorrow at the thought of so much effort wasted at such a time! The boys in the East had already liberated their native land and had crossed the frontiers of the Soviet Union and were coming towards them; but he would not be there to meet them even though he had made such an effort to do so...

Giulia cast a glance full of despair at the gloomy ravine and even, now and again, looked at those up above them who did not go away but sat there watching them.

"Ivanio! Where is God? Where is Madonna? Where is justice? Why fascism not punished?" she asked, wringing her delicate brown hands in her despair.

"There is justice and they will be punished!" he said, as though he had suddenly been awakened. "They'll be punished!"

"Who punish them? England? America? Soviet Union?"

"Of course the Soviet Union will. The Soviet Union will break the necks of those swine."

"Soviet Union?"

"Of course."

Giulia turned towards him, her eyes filled with a sudden hope.

"Is it good? Is it the best? Best of all?"

He stared at her with unseeing eyes.

"What?"

"Is Russia good? Just? *Nobile*? Yesterday Ivanio tell me true, eh?"

It was in a new light that he suddenly saw her, himself and his distant country, what that country had been to him all his life, and what it could have been.

"Yes," he answered firmly, "Russia is the very best, the most beautiful country, the pride of the whole world. There's nowhere better! And what will it be like in the future, after the war? When we have crushed Hitler. If I could only see it, if I could see it just for one day!... Only one day!..."

In his excitement he tore bunches of course lichen from the rocks; a wave of intolerably intense love for his native land swept through him and he could not say another word; he felt that he was ready to cry, something that had never happened to him before. Giulia seemed to understand that, and put her hand tenderly on his knee.

"I know," she said, almost through tears but with a bright smile. "I know. I believe you. Little time I thought Ivan no say truth. I was wrong..."

She seemed somehow to have taken heart all at once, to

have really brightened up. It was cold, a piercing wind was blowing from out of the ravine and Giulia pulled the leather jacket round her body and legs. Her red, bleeding feet were cold as they rested on the stones and there was nothing to cover them with. She suddenly remembered something and turned to face the Germans, rose to her knees and began singing, simply and without any introduction, her favourite Russian song, *Katyusha*—"The apples and pears were blooming..."[1]

At first Ivan was surprised—the song seemed very much out of place on the brink of that grave—but when he saw how the Germans suddenly stood stock still up there in the saddle, he began to sing with her.

The song seemed to have astonished the Germans, for they shouted something; Ivan did not hear their shouts, he was fully engrossed in the simple melody that had unexpectedly relieved them of their feeling of doom and had carried them into another world, a world that was humane and indescribably bright.

The Germans did not long remain astonished at their insolence—one of them slipped his submachine-gun off his shoulder and fired a burst towards them—this time the bullets raised little clouds of dust among the stones, which were quickly swept away by the wind. Ivan pulled the skirt of the leather jacket and Giulia unwillingly bent down and hid her head behind a rock.

"Shoot, you swine, shoot! Let them hear!" he said to himself, thinking of the camp that listened all the time for shots in the mountains. "Let them know we're still alive!"

They lay behind the barrier of rocks for several minutes, waiting as long as the bursts of fire thundered over the ravine. Very few bullets reached them, however, the Germans were trying to scare them, to keep them afraid and submissive. Then they stopped firing. The echo rolled over a long distance and before it had had time to die away altogether, the wind brought new, but familiar sounds from the other side of the pass. Giulia threw back her head and wanted to say something, but Ivan stopped her with a gesture—they listened, staring intently at each other. Although Giulia was there beside him, Ivan cursed roundly—dogs were baying on the saddle.

Ivan's long suppressed rage suddenly burst out; he rose to full height and stood there with his feet wide apart, enraged and terrible to see.

"Brutes!" he screamed at the Germans. "Animals! You're afraid of us yourselves and have to send for helpers! You won't take us, anyway! D'you get that?"

Of course, they could have shot him, but they did not shoot, they seemed to be trying to understand what that escapee was shouting to them. Ivan was filled with nervous excitement and was shivering—he was probably running a temperature. He looked up—the weather was clearing up, through breaks in the clouds he could see patches of blue, bright in the rays of the morning sun. He expected the Bear Range to appear out of the clouds at any moment, the Bear Range that he would never reach. He wanted so much to see it in the sun's rays, but the mountains were still hidden and that made him intolerably bitter.

Ivan dropped to the ground—that which was about to happen no longer interested him since he knew it all in advance. He did not even look round when the dogs appeared over the saddle—they came on and on, aroused by the excitement of the chase. Giulia suddenly threw herself on Ivan, pressed close to him and covered her face with her hands.

"Not dogs! Not dogs! Ivanio, shoot, quick, shoot!"

Anger, and that first outburst of his, suddenly disappeared and he again grew calm. It would be easy to kill himself, but to treat Giulia in the same way was terrible and he would have to do it. It was the only way. He could not allow the SS to take them alive so as to hang them in the camp—let them drag the dead back! Since they had not been able to reach freedom they would at least annoy the Germans by dying.

At that moment the Germans unleashed the dogs.

One, two, three, four, five brown Alsatians, let off the leash, stretched out as they raced downhill, the Germans following behind them. Realising that the SS men were almost on top of them, Ivan jumped up and seized Giulia by the arm; she threw her arms around his neck and her tears choked her. He realised that he ought to say something—the most important thing of all remained in his heart unsaid, but all words had somehow disappeared, and the dogs were already whining in anticipation as they raced down the hollow. He pushed her away from him to the very brink of the precipice. The girl did not resist, she only gasped as though she were choking; her eyes grew bigger and bigger, but there were no tears in them—there was nothing now but fear and a cry stilled by that fear.

On the brink he glanced down into the ravine—it was still gloomy, dank and cold; the mist had become thinner and here and there patches of snow could be seen. One of them crept upwards in a narrow tongue and a daring but hopeful idea flashed through his mind. He was afraid there would be no time and so he said nothing to Giulia; he lowered

the pistol he had raised and pushed the girl to the very edge of the precipice.

"Jump!"

Giulia staggered back in fear and he shouted again.

"Jump into the snow!" She again hurled herself back and covered her face with her hands.

In the meantime the dogs, as Ivan could judge by the sound of their baying close behind him, had reached the bare stone mound. He pushed the pistol between his teeth and jumped towards the girl. In a burst of sudden and furious strength he seized her by the collar and the seat of her trousers and hurled her madly into the abyss, feet forward. In the last instant he saw her body spread-eagled in the air as she flew over the precipice, but whether she fell into the snow or not he did not know. He only realised that he, with his bad leg, would not be able to jump.

The dogs howled furiously as they saw him there and Ivan moved a couple of paces away from the brink. The leading dog was a great hulking wolf-hound with one ear; it leapt across the rocks and then rose on to its hind legs right beside him. Ivan did not take aim, but unhurriedly, with the almost superhuman attention he was still capable of, fired straight into its open jaws and then, without a pause fired at the second. One Ear was carried on by inertia straight into the abyss but the second was unfortunately not alone—there were two more dogs running behind it and Ivan did not have time to see whether he had hit it or not.

His bewilderment was cut short by a savage blow in the chest, an unbearable pain came to his throat, for an instant the cloudy sky flashed before his eyes and was then shut out for ever...

Epilogue

To Ivan's relatives, to the people who knew him, the village of Tereshki by the Two Blue Lakes in Byelorussia—Greetings!

Giulia Novelli is writing to you from Rome and asks you not to be surprised that an unknown Italian lady knows your fellow-countryman, knows the village of Tereshki beside the Two Blue Lakes in Byelorussia and is able today, after so many years of searching, to send you this letter.

You have not, of course, forgotten that terrible time in the world, humanity's black night, when thousands of people were dying with despair in their hearts. Some people left this life blessing death as a deliverance from the torments

fascism still had in store for them, and this gave them strength to meet the end with dignity and not sin before their own conscience. Others, in a heroic duel, forced death itself to its knees and provided mankind with a lofty example of courage; and these people died, amazing even their enemies who when they won found no satisfaction in their victory, so doubtful was that victory.

Such a man was your fellow-countryman, Ivan Tereshka, with whom the will of Providence brought me together on the hard road of victorious struggle and tremendous loss. I had the good fortune to share with Ivan the last three days of his life—days as long as centuries, days of flight, love and unbelievable happiness. It was not God's will that I should share death with Ivan—fate or an ordinary snowdrift that had not thawed out on the mountain-side saved me from being killed in a ravine, although it was a death I would have preferred to the crematorium. Then some good people picked me up, warmed me and saved my life. All that, of course, happened later, but at that very first moment when I opened my eyes and realised that I was alive, Ivan was already dead—high up among the clouds the baying of the dogs died down and there was nothing but the echo of his two shots that thundered down the ravine, echoing further and further away.

Gradually I returned to life. At first it seemed to have no meaning for me without him, and my long months of loneliness were filled only by those sad and happy days I lived together with him. I could describe him to you, tell you what sort of man Ivan was, but I am sure you know him better than I do. I only want to tell you that all my subsequent life has been closely bound up with him—my modest work in the Peace Committee and the publication of a trade union newspaper and bringing up his son Giovanni who is now eighteen and intends to become a journalist. (Incidentally, he translated my letter into Russian because I do not know your language as well as my son does although I have studied it.) Another thing—I have a map of Byelorussia hanging in my room, a map of the country Ivan loved so well. It is a pity I have no photo of Ivan. Any sort of photo, as a child, as a young man, or, still better, as a soldier.

Sometimes when I recall Ivan I shudder at the thought that I might never have met him, that I might have been in another camp and not seen his fight against the *Kommandoführer*, and that I might not have escaped with him after the terrible explosion; I might have gone through life somewhere apart from him and never have been close to him. But that did not happen and now I give thanks to

Providence, thanks for all the trials that fell to my lot, thanks for the chance that brought us together.

That is all. *Finita.*

With gratitude to all—to those who bore, brought up and knew this man, truly worthy of admiration for his courage.

Thanks, thanks for everything,

Yours sincerely,

Giulia Novelli of Rome

1964

BORIS PASTERNAK

Spring

This spring the world is something special.
The sparrows fuss with added zeal.
It really baffles all expression,
How light and quiet at heart I feel.

New moods infuse my thinking, writing
As a loud octave in the chorus,
I hear the voices, earthy, mighty,
Of liberated territories.

The mother country's vernal breathing
Dissolves all vestiges of winter,
The eyes of brother-Slavs relieving
Of four years' tear-stains, black and bitter.

The grass is on the verge of sprouting.
The streets of ancient Prague, still sullen
Lie, one more twisted than the other,
But soon will gush with life like gullies.

The lore of Czechia, Moravia
And Serbia with spring's soft power
Will lift the heavy veil of slavery,
Emerging from the snow to flower.

On all will fall a charm as buoyant
As whorls on guilded walls in homes
Of mediaeval Russian boyars
Or on St. Basil's[1] gorgeous domes.

But for the dreamer, night-oil burner
The dearest place is here, in Moscow.
At home and at the primal sources
Of all with which the age will blossom.

1944

Boris Pasternak (1890-1960)—Soviet poet, prose writer, translator, Nobel Prize winner. Pasternak is the author of the lyrical anthologies *My Sister—Life* (1922), *Second Birth* (1932), the cycle *When It Clears Up* (1956-1959), the historico-revolutionary poems *The Year 1905* (1925-1926) and *Lieutenant Schmidt* (1926-1927), the novel *Doctor Zhivago* (1956), stories and translations of works by Shakespeare, Goethe, Verlaine and Georgian poets.

A number of Pasternak's poems written during the war reflect the poet's impression of his visits to the front as a correspondent.

© Boris Pasternak, "Spring" in *Let the Living Remember...*, pp. 213-214.

IVAN KONEV

Year of Victory

(An Excerpt)

Ivan Konev (1897-1973)—Marshal of the Soviet Union. During the war he was in command of a number of Fronts, and the troops under his command distinguished themselves in the battles of Smolensk, of Moscow, at Kursk, on the Dnieper, and in the Berlin and Prague operations.

The extract from Konev's memoirs *Year of Victory* (1st edition—1969) printed below, describes how, in January 1945, the combined forces of four Fronts began the Vistula-Oder strategic offensive operation, the aim of which was to complete the liberation of Poland and the creation of conditions favourable for delivering the decisive blow against Berlin.

January 12, 1945, came at last.

In the evening I went to the observation post of the Front. It was a small farm house located on the edge of a wood near the main line of resistance. One of the rooms had a window facing west from which observation was possible. In addition, there was a small hill nearby, where we had established an observation and control system. If we were fired upon in the farm house, we could move to the hill. But it was winter and there was no need to stay up there in a trench, especially since the farm house afforded a fine view of the surrounding country.

The artillery attack was set for 05.00 hrs. Assuming, as had often happened during the war, that, in order to save his forces, the enemy might withdraw some troops before the beginning of our offensive and leave for the period of artillery preparation only a weak covering force on the main line of resistance, we decided to make a reconnaissance in force, using the forward battalions.

Reconnaissance in force was nothing new; it had been made before the beginning of the offensive in many other operations. We realised, however, that it had acquired a certain stereotype pattern to which the Germans had become accustomed and against which they had found an antidote. The stereotype part of it was that the reconnaissance in force was usually made the day before the offensive, then the data obtained was collected and analysed, assault positions were taken up correspondingly and the offensive was begun the next day.

This time we decided to act differently, so as to prevent the enemy from reorganising his defences after our recon-

© I. Konev, *Year of Victory*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1984, pp. 17-32 (second printing).

naissance in force. To achieve this, we resolved to deliver a short but powerful artillery attack and immediately follow it up with reconnaissance in force by our forward battalions; if we then discovered that the enemy had not withdrawn his troops, we were to bring down the whole power of our artillery fire upon his positions. Such was our plan. If it had turned out, however, that the Nazis had withdrawn their troops, we would, without wasting any shells, immediately shift our fire to where they had taken up their new positions.

Apart from my natural desire to see the beginning of the offensive with my own eyes I came to the Front observation post to be able to make the necessary decisions on the spot, if the operations of the forward battalions showed that the enemy had withdrawn.

The enemy might withdraw to any depth, including one that would require redeployment of some of the artillery and, consequently, a certain lull. In short, a situation might arise in which I, as the Front commander, would have to make urgent decisions which it would be desirable to check on the spot so that I could issue appropriate instructions.

The observation post in the immediate proximity of the battle formations and provided with all means of communication and control was the most suitable place. I arrived at the observation post together with Generals Krainyukov and Kalchenko, members of the Front Military Council, and General Sokolovsky, Chief of Staff of the Front.

At 05.00 hrs after a short but powerful artillery attack, the forward battalions launched an assault and soon captured the first trench of the enemy defences. The very first reports made it clear that the enemy had not withdrawn, but had remained in the zone of all the artillery attacks we had planned.

Despite its short duration the artillery attack was so powerful that the enemy thought it was the beginning of the general artillery preparation. Taking the action of the forward battalions for the general offensive of our troops the Nazis tried to stop it with all the fire weapons at their disposal.

This was just what we had counted on. After capturing the first trench our forward battalions took cover between the first and second trenches. This was when our artillery preparation started. It lasted one hour and forty-seven minutes and was so powerful that, judging by a number of captured documents, it seemed to the enemy to have lasted not less than five hours.

After beginning the artillery preparation we departed from our usual practice of withdrawing our forward battalions which had captured the first enemy trench. Each battery had its target clearly defined on the general geodesic map, and we tried to make everything "spot on", as they say. The first trench, already captured by us, and the second trench, still occupied by Nazi troops, were clearly marked on the maps of all the artillery observers and battery commanders.

All the gunners had to do was shoot straight. And they never failed; not once did they get an alarm signal—"Stop, you are hitting your own men"—from any of the troops attacking along the entire front.

The weather forecasts were more than confirmed. Not only in the dark, when the artillery preparation was started, but also later, after daybreak, visibility was actually zero. It snowed heavily and it looked as though the weather had taken special pains to provide us with additional camouflage. Several hours later, when Rybalko's tank army was entering the gap, the tanks were so camouflaged by the snow that they could be distinguished from the terrain only because they were moving.

Of course, such weather had its drawbacks. What was good for camouflage was bad for observation. But everything had been so thoroughly planned and co-ordinated beforehand that no confusion occurred either during the artillery preparation, the breakthrough or its exploitation with tanks. All our plans were fulfilled that day with particular promptness which, it must be said, is not so often achieved in war. It is this that gives me most pleasure in recalling the day of the breakthrough.

During our artillery preparation the enemy troops, including part of the reserves disposed in the tactical zone of defence or, to put it simply, too close to the main line of resistance, found themselves under heavy artillery fire, were demoralised and unable to perform their missions.

Taken prisoner during the very first hours of the breakthrough, the commanders of Nazi units testified that their officers and men had lost all self-control. On their own initiative (and it must be said that this was not characteristic of the Germans) they abandoned their positions. As a rule—and this rule was repeatedly confirmed all through the war—German soldiers stayed where they were ordered to stay and never retreated without permission, but on that day, January 12, the fire was so merciless that those who remained alive lost all self-possession.

Control and communications in the enemy units were

completely disrupted. To us that was no accident, for we had planned it, having spotted all the enemy observation and command posts beforehand. We had concentrated our fire particularly on the entire communication and control system, including the command post of the German 4th Panzer Army in the breakthrough sector, and had crushed them during the very first minutes of shelling and bombing.

In their analysis of this operation West German military historians are inclined, as also in a number of other cases, to blame only Hitler for all their failures. They accuse him of having ordered the placing of the reserves, including the 24th Panzer Corps, in the immediate proximity to the front, as a result of which these reserves allegedly at once came under our heavy fire and suffered great losses.

I admit that in this case the military historians are partly right. Since the 4th Panzer Army held defences in an important operational direction, which covered the distant approaches to Berlin, it is not improbable that, because of his own ideas of how the stability of the troops should be maintained, Hitler really demanded that the reserves should be brought up closer to the front. At any rate, according to the impressions I gathered in the course of the war, such unskilled disposition of the operational reserves, as in that operation, was not characteristic of the Nazi generals. From the point of view of elementary requirements of the art of war that was profanation pure and simple.

However, Hitler was only partly to blame for that, and we take the greater part of the blame upon ourselves. Actually, the German reserves were located not on the main line of resistance, but in the rear, and, if the fire of our artillery preparation had not been so dense and deep, they would not have suffered such catastrophic losses during the very first hours.

In an attempt to check the further advance of our troops the Nazi command began hastily to withdraw the remnants of their battered units to the second line of defence. Their withdrawal took place under the continuous fire of our artillery, and the enemy suffered increasing losses. Generally speaking, the Nazi command did right in making a quick decision to withdraw everything that was still intact. And yet they managed to salvage very little of what had faced us on the first line of defence in the breakthrough sector.

About two hours after the end of the artillery preparation, when the infantry and the close support tanks rushed forward, I drove round the penetration sector. Everything was literally ploughed up, especially in the direction of the main attack delivered by Zhadov's, Koroteyev's and Pukhov's

armies. Everything was uprooted, turned over or buried. And no wonder. The enemy was fired upon by 250-280 and in some places even 300 guns (not to mention the small calibre guns and mortars) per kilometre of front. "Real punch!" as our soldiers called it.

Part of Gordov's 3rd Guards Army, Pukhov's 13th Army, Koroteyev's 52nd Army and Zhadov's 5th Guards Army advanced during the first day of fighting 15-20 km and, breaking through the main line of German defences, widened the gap 40-60 km in the direction of both flanks.

The successful infantry advance and the widening of the gap enabled us, as early as the middle of the first day, to send Rybalko's and Lelyushenko's armies into the gap. We could not allow the Nazis to organise a counter-attack with their reserves of two panzer and two motorised divisions. They had partly come under our long-range artillery fire, but were still a rather serious force.

The enemy intended to strike at the first echelon of the attacking armies before we had sent our armoured forces into the gap, to crush our infantry and prevent our tanks from being committed to action. The gist of our plan was to preclude this. By the time the enemy panzer and motorised divisions were ready for the attack the forward units of our tank armies had appeared in the zone of their disposition.

Our tank armies entered the enormous gap made for them calmly, smoothly and efficiently. The Nazis attempted to commit their panzers to action from the area south of Kielce and ran into our tanks.

Many a lance has been broken in military science over the question of when tank units should be sent into the gap. The opinions on this subject differed even during the war. I, too, had my opinion. In 1943, and 1944, and 1945 the Fronts under my command invariably had tank armies, armoured and mechanised corps, and my views on this question are the result of my experience.

I held that under the pressure of some tank commanders GHQ needlessly hesitated to exploit a breakthrough with tanks. This was due to the fear—I must add, at times excessive—of subjecting the armoured troops to great losses in the struggle for the main line of resistance and the main line of enemy defence.

Sometimes GHQ intervened and set its own time for engaging the tanks. Of course, no good came of that because, when you are given strict orders exactly when to send your tanks into the breach, they are often so out of keeping with the actual situation on the front that the rigid time-table sent down from the top just cannot be used.

The situations which actually arose during operations varied very widely and, to make decisions, it was necessary to take into account factors which could not be foreseen from afar. Here we cannot and must not really have any fixed pattern.

To my mind the most interesting exploitation of a breakthrough with tanks was during the Lvov-Sandomierz operation in July 1944. The gap made by artillery and infantry was only 6-8 km wide, but I sent in Rybalko's 3rd Tank Army just the same, and this decision later proved wholly justified. If we hadn't dared take this measure, we would have had to be gnawing through the well-organised German defences in the direction of Lvov for a long time. The infantry did not have enough close support tanks, and the offensive would have been very slow. And when you gnaw rather than break through the defences you can hardly expect success. Gnawing through the defences was a method used in the First World War, when the offensive possibilities were limited, whereas during the second half of the Great Patriotic War we had extensive possibilities. We had powerful tanks and excellent self-propelled guns. I have always thought it wrong to have such equipment and fail to use its firing power and manoeuvre to the utmost, planning the breakthroughs as they were planned during the First World War and keeping the tanks inactive, while the infantry was gnawing through the enemy defences.

In the Lvov operation I estimated our real possibilities and decided to exploit the breakthrough with tanks, sending Rybalko's tank army into the gap with a resolution that justified itself.

Then what can we say about the Vistula-Oder operation if the gate that opened up before the tanks was wide enough for a carriage-and-three? Here, as they would have said in olden times, God himself willed it that we should send tanks into the breach at once, the very first day.

On the day of our breakthrough we captured several German unit commanders and staff officers, but I had no time to talk to them. I am therefore unable to tell the reader how everything that happened on the battlefield looked to the enemy. But this can in some measure be remedied. The breakthrough is quite objectively described by General Kurt von Tippelskirch[1] in his book *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*. His testimony, it seems to me, is by no means superfluous to the picture I am trying to draw.

Here is what Tippelskirch wrote about January 12:

"The attack was so strong that it smashed not only the divisions of the first echelon, but also the rather large mobile

reserves brought up very close to the front by Hitler's categorical order. The latter had suffered losses already from the Russian artillery preparation and subsequently, as a result of the general retreat, could not be used according to plan at all. The deep wedges driven into the German front were so numerous that we were unable to eliminate or even limit them. The front of the 4th Panzer Army was torn to pieces, and it was absolutely impossible to contain the offensive of the Russian troops. The latter at once sent tank units into the breaches; their main forces began to advance towards the Nidda, while their northern flank launched an enveloping attack in the direction of Kielce."

At the approaches to the city of Kielce the Germans fought stubbornly; at first this slowed down the advance of Gordov's 3rd Guards Army and Pukhov's 13th Army. As soon as this was reported to us we turned Lelyushenko's 4th Tank Army, which was on the move, and ordered it to envelop Kielce from the south-west. As a result of this manoeuvre, Kielce was taken on the fourth day of the offensive (January 15), most of the Nazi troops resisting at the approaches to the city were crushed and the remnants were driven into the woods north of Kielce. Subsequently, they linked up with the remnants of other defeated armies, which were retreating under the onslaught of the 1st Byelorussian Front, and formed one rather large group consisting of several divisions. This group remained deep in our rear, behind the linked-up flanks of the 1st Ukrainian and 1st Byelorussian fronts.

This was the characteristic feature of the Vistula-Oder operation and of the final period of the war in general. We no longer strove to establish a double—inner and outer—front around each such enemy group. We believed, and rightly so, that, if we developed our offensive rapidly enough, even quite serious enemy forces cut off and remaining in our rear were no longer dangerous to us. Sooner or later they would be defeated and destroyed by the second echelons of our troops.

That was what finally happened even to so large a group as I have just mentioned. It tried to break out of encirclement, but was defeated twice and then, half-dispersed, roamed through the woods in the rear of our troops until it was completely destroyed in minor skirmishes.

It was somewhat more complicated with the mobile enemy panzer and mechanised troops which had remained in our rear. Upon arriving at the forward control post on the outskirts of the town of Czestochowa at the height of our offensive I listened to an excited report from one of my

subordinates to the effect that a large enemy group of panzer and mechanised troops was moving from our rear directly towards Czestochowa, i.e., directly towards us.

The situation was not very favourable: ahead of us were our troops which had gone beyond Czestochowa to the west; in the middle was the forward command post of the Front; and behind, an enemy panzer corps. At any rate that was how it appeared from the initial report, although, as always in such cases, it was exaggerated. Actually only one enemy panzer division, which had been swelled by various scattered units, was advancing on us from the rear. But it was advancing, I must say, in quite an organised manner and resolutely breaking through our rear area.

Of course, the news did not please me at all, but it was not unexpected. We assumed that because of our rapid advance there might be separate roaming "pockets" in our rear. In modern warfare this is natural. The manoeuvering armies leave gaps between them, the attackers' front is not and should not be continuous, and there is no need whatever to advance side by side, shoulder to shoulder. What matters is that the units and formations should co-operate, have reliable communications and be controllable at any moment of the fighting.

The considerations I am setting forth had by that time essentially become our rule and custom. That was why before the beginning of the Vistula-Oder operation we had left in the reserve of the front the 7th Guards Mechanised Corps under the command of Lieutenant-General I. P. Korchagin. In the course of the offensive this corps followed the advancing troops from line to line, kept in continuous touch with us and was constantly under my control.

This corps was ordered to use part of its forces to destroy the mechanised enemy group moving towards Czestochowa. The operation was directed by Major-General D. M. Bárinov, Chief of Staff of the Corps, who performed his mission swiftly and efficiently. Thanks to his resolute actions the greater part of the encircled enemy group was taken prisoner and there was no need for a long battle of annihilation.

While the remnants of enemy groups, which tried to break out of encirclement or roved the woods, were being destroyed, the offensive of the main forces of the Front continued apace. The troops had rapidly negotiated the intermediate line of enemy defences along the Nidda and forced the Pilica and Warta at speed. The offensive was so swift that we reached the lines of the rivers flowing perpendicularly to our movement before the retreating Nazi troops. That was a very important factor because, if we had let the enemy

occupy the positions they had prepared beforehand (especially with such natural obstacles as rivers), the operation would have immediately slowed down.

This kind of movement, on parallel courses, so to speak, with the enemy being headed off and river lines captured in the depth of the enemy defences had also been foreseen by us. We knew there were many rivers with marshy, peaty valleys and boggy soil ahead of us; this was very unfavourable to armoured troops, especially in the changeable Polish winter in which it thaws out today, freezes a little tomorrow, then snows a bit and then becomes slushy again.

We anticipated all this and saw to it that no mobile facilities should be used for crossing to the bridgehead before the breakthrough. All the first echelons of our troops, especially armoured and mechanised, went into the gap with a set and even more than a set of crossing equipment, which enabled them very swiftly to erect ferries across the rivers in the depth of the enemy defence area.

Such preparation plus the rate of advance established from the very beginning, plus the resolution and efficiency of the commanders of armies, corps, divisions and brigades enabled us to reach the rivers quickly and cross them before enemy troops appeared on the scene.

Events went particularly well in the centre and on the right flank of the assault group. Big things were also in the offing on the left flank of the Front. Taking advantage of the success of our troops in the direction of the main attack, Korovnikov's 59th Army and Kurochkin's 60th Army had rapidly advanced towards Krakow. The enemy had fortified the area of Krakow and transformed it into a veritable fortress barring the approaches to the Silesian industrial area.

Without diminishing the force of the attack or decreasing the troops in the main direction of the offensive we now had to use part of the second echelon of the Front to form a new assault group in the Krakow direction. Krakow interested us not only as the key to the Silesian industrial area, but also as a large city and the old Polish capital.

The situation for a successful advance in the Krakow and then the Silesian direction was favourable. The troops of Zhadov's 5th Guards Army and Rybalko's 3rd Guards Tank Army, which operated in the Czestochowa direction, were already threatening the Krakow area in the north, when the 4th Ukrainian Front, on our left, assumed the offensive on January 15.

The attacks of the First and Fourth Ukrainian Fronts against both flanks of the German 17th Army threatened it with encirclement. Under the onslaught of General

K. S. Moskalenko's 38th Army, which formed part of the Fourth Ukrainian Front, at that time under the command of General I. Y. Petrov, the Nazis, who were south of Krakow, began to retreat westward. That enabled the troops of our left flank to reach the approaches to Krakow towards the end of the day of January 17.

But before discussing the Krakow episode of the Vistula-Oder operation I should perhaps give the reader a general idea of the situation on the 1st Ukrainian Front towards the end of the day of January 17, i.e., five and a half days after the beginning of the offensive.

By that time the enemy defences had been penetrated on a front 250 km wide and 120-140 km deep. The troops of the Front had routed the main forces of the 4th Panzer Army and the 24th Reserve Panzer Corps and had inflicted a telling defeat on the 17th Field Army, which formed part of the enemy Army Group A under the command of General Harpe. The situation was favourable for a further advance in the main, Breslau direction and for attacking the flank and rear of the Krakow-Silesian enemy group.

Making use of everything they could lay their hands on—the remnants of the retreating units and the reserves sent up from inland—the Nazis tried their utmost to check the further advance of our main group towards the Oder. At the same time they persisted in defending Krakow and, to all appearances, despite the critical situation that had arisen north of them, were preparing to offer the fiercest resistance also in the Silesian industrial area.

Of course, it would have been strange if they had not intended to put up a fight there. In output the Silesian industrial area was second only to the Ruhr which, incidentally, was by that time also threatened by our Allies. The Nazis apparently intended, by basing themselves on the strongly fortified Krakow area, to stop us and subsequently, at their first opportunity, by attacking northward, as well as striking at the flank and rear of our main group, to break up our offensive and retain the whole Silesian industrial area.

A few words about the strength of the enemy resistance we had generally encountered during this operation. At the beginning of the operation the Nazi divisions (especially those facing the Sandomierz bridgehead) were fully manned and numbered close to 12,000 officers and men each. In other words, an enemy infantry division corresponded to about two of our infantry divisions. The Nazis had substantial forces, and we expected from the very outset that they would fight stubbornly, the more so since it was evident

that the fighting would now be carried on to the territory of the Third Reich.

Not all Germans by any means had observed the decline of the Third Reich, and the critical situation had as yet hardly affected the behaviour of Nazi soldiers on the battlefield: they continued to fight as before and were exceptionally staunch, sometimes to the point of fanaticism, especially in defence. The level of army organisation was still high, and the divisions were manned, armed and supplied with all or nearly all they needed.

Nor were there as yet any signs of broken morale in the Nazi army. To this we may add such important factors as Goebbels's propaganda, which scared the soldiers by persuading them that the Russians would raze Germany to the ground and drive all Germans to Siberia, on the one hand, and the cruel repressions to which the same German soldiers were subjected and which increased towards the end of the war, on the other hand.

The morale of the German army was appreciably raised by the offensive operation in the Ardennes. According to the prisoners, at that time the opinion prevailed among officers and soldiers that after defeating the Allies in the Ardennes and forcing them to conclude a separate treaty the German Command would hurl all its forces from all fronts against the Soviet Union. These rumours continued to circulate even when the German offensive operation in the Ardennes had completely petered out.

But let us get back to the fighting near Krakow.

Early in the morning of January 19, I went to the observation post of General Korovnikov's 59th Army. After advancing all the week the troops of this army were now being concentrated for an attack directly against Krakow from the north and north-west. The city could already be seen from the observation post.

Sizing up the situation on the spot, the commander of the army and I decided to order General Poluboyarov's 4th Guards Tank Corps, attached to this army, to envelop Krakow from the west. Combined with the operations of the 60th Army, which was then approaching the south-eastern and southern outskirts of Krakow, this manoeuvre threatened the Krakow garrison with encirclement.

The troops of the 59th Army were already preparing for an assault. They were ordered to break into the city from the north and north-west and capture the bridges spanning the Vistula, thereby making it impossible for the enemy to protract the resistance in the city itself.

I considered operational swiftness on the part of all the troops participating in the offensive against Krakow to be of paramount importance because only thus could we save Krakow from destruction. We wanted to take the city intact. The Front command decided not to shell or bomb it, but the fortified approaches to the city, on which the enemy defences were based, were subjected to heavy artillery fire that morning.

After planning the forthcoming attack at the observation post, Korovnikov and I drove out in jeeps directly to the battle formations of his troops. Poluboyarov's corps was already entering the city from the west, while on the northern outskirts fighting was in full swing.

The advance was successful. The Nazis were delivering rifle, submachine-gun, machine-gun, artillery and, at times, panzer fire, but despite the roar and din we could feel that their fire was dying out and that they were essentially already demoralised. The threat of encirclement paralysed the enemy's resolve to hold on to the city. The last road running west might be cut by Poluboyarov's corps at any moment. Only one road—south, to the mountains—remained to the Nazis, and they began a hasty retreat.

In this case we did not intend to deprive the Nazis of their last chance to retreat. Had we done so, it would later have taken us a long time to extirpate them from the city and we should undoubtedly have destroyed Krakow. However tempting it was to encircle the enemy, we did not do it, although we had every chance to. While threatening the enemy with encirclement, our infantry and tanks drove him out of the city by a frontal attack.

Battering the enemy rearguard General Korovnikov's troops had by evening gone right through the city, while units of the 4th Guards Tank Corps, attacking from the north-west, and units of the 60th Army, attacking from the east and south-east, inflicted heavy losses on the Nazis during and after their exit from Krakow. The skilful operations of Korovnikov's, Kurochkin's and Poluboyarov's troops saved one of Poland's oldest and most beautiful cities.

It is said that in the course of a long war soldiers get used to the sight of ruins. But, however accustomed to ruins they may become, they can never reconcile themselves to them, and we were enormously happy that we had been able to liberate such a city as Krakow intact.

Incidentally the Nazis had planted more than enough mines in the city; they had laid them under all the main structures and many historical buildings, but were unable to set them off. Nor did the self-exploding, delayed action

mines have a chance to explode because the engineer troops of the armies and the Front worked all through the first day without a let-up.

That day, during the fighting, I visited only the northern outskirts of the city, but by the next day, exactly 24 hours later, I already saw cleared routes with the "visiting cards" of the engineers reading "Cleared of mines", "No mines" and "Demined".

The troops advanced, and, as early as January 20, I drove through Krakow together with the staff officers of the Front to a new forward command post. We examined with interest what we could see from our cars, but regrettably could not stop to see the sights of the city. Every moment counted. A new operation was in the offing—the operation of capturing the Silesian area.

It may seem strange today, but I really saw Krakow only ten years later when I arrived for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of its liberation. I visited the famous Wawel, the palaces, cathedrals and Nowa Huta, this new and beautiful industrial centre of Poland.

Incidentally, it was from there, from the area where Nowa Huta is now situated that we attacked Krakow. These were the very places where the battles were fought.

On January 20, when I was on my way west, important events were about to take place at the front. New fighting was ahead of us; we were already on the very threshold of Hitler Germany.

1969

BORIS POLEVOI

These Four Years

(Excerpts)

An Expedition into Hell

That morning a soldier-errand man brought me a telegramme still smelling of paste.

"Very urgent. Sign and put the time."

The telegramme read: "From Rychag to Semaphore. To *Pravda* correspondent Lieutenant-Colonel Polevoi. To be delivered immediately. To find out about hell go immediately to liberated Oswięcim. Tell Krushinsky. Am at the first stube, Nikolayev."

We had no idea what "stube" meant, but we knew Lieutenant-Colonel Nikolayev—a man who was in the reconnaissance, but who was a born correspondent and knew what we correspondents needed. During all the years when Hitler was in power, dreadful rumours had circulated about this gigantic concentration camp, but no one knew anything for certain. There were no live witnesses. No one emerged alive from there, and this camp was seen as a corner of hell upon earth.

We went out there by plane. As once before with Nikolayev, the two of us squeezed ourselves onto the single back seat.

The weather was miserable, and we had to fly against the wind. Large flakes of snow were falling, and the propeller seemed to be clearing a path for itself as we flew as though enveloped in a cocoon of moving gauze. It was damp and cold, but we did not notice. Our thoughts were already in Oswięcim where, so it was said, a whole combine of destruction had been in operation, and three or four million people had been cremated.

It was a difficult flight, but before we arrived in Oswięcim it had stopped snowing, and a small town appeared in front of us in the dismal colours of an overcast day. It was located by a railway junction. A pleasant-looking, innocuous little

Boris Polevoi (1908-1982)—Soviet prose writer, journalist, State Prizes winner, author of *A Story About a Real Man* (1946), the collection of stories *We Are Soviet People* (1948), and the novels *Gold* (1950) and *Doctor Vera* (1966).

Since the beginning of the war Polevoi was a war correspondent for *Pravda*, and wrote many articles about events at the front-line. His impressions of the war are most fully reflected in his book *These Four Years. From the Notes of a War Correspondent* (1968-1971).

Several chapters from this book relating to the events of 1945 are printed below.

town. The pilot turned round questioningly: where was the camp? Krushinsky gestured to indicate that he should circle round. He proved to be right. As we circled for the second time we saw beneath us a huge chemical combine, enormous workshops, and, projecting out of the ground, something resembling cylinders, tanks, and pipeline joints.

This was Oswięcim. We knew that most of the prisoners had worked at chemical factories. And here was the camp itself. An enormous territory covered with small rectangular buildings. They stretched in rows, like neatly arranged bricks. There was a kind of square in the centre. Not far from the square was a row of square-shaped, soot-blackened chimneys near a strange-looking, rather long, concrete structure. All of this was behind a huge wall with barbed and electrified wiring. There were a large number of people in the streets, moving rather oddly, as if without any purpose, like autumn leaves swept by gusts of wind.

The pilot had already decided where the runway would be and we landed. We helped him to turn round the plane, and then walked across a field dusted with melting snow towards the camp. The tarmac road led to huge iron gates, over which we could see in wrought-iron letters "Arbeit macht frei!"

Here this inscription could only be taken as a piece of unparalleled cynicism. As we approached the gates, a crowd of about two hundred people poured out of them. They were all dressed alike in tarpaulin jackets, striped trousers, caps, and shoes made of cloth tops and wooden soles. They were all thin, pale and sickly-looking, but on their exhausted faces there seemed to be the glimmerings of timid, uncertain smiles. They were shouting something back through the open gates, from where others wearing similar dress were waving to them. From the crowd came the smell of carbolic, sweat, the heavy odour of unwashed clothes.

One of the men suddenly rushed out into the field, seized a handful of snow and began to eat it. Others followed his example. Some ran and slithered along the ice. The first one fell, the rest collapsed on top of him, and they all burst out laughing like schoolboys on their way home. Others could scarcely drag themselves along, their wooden soles scuffling along the tarmac. Three were being supported under the arms.

There had been no concentration camps along our front-line advance, and our first encounter with Nazi prisoners—Poles who had not waited for the organised evacuation and were making their way home on foot—had simply stunned us. The stube proved to be a two-storey building with the number 1. It was here that we found Nikolayev, sitting in

one of the offices. The room was full of people wearing the same striped clothes and having seemingly the same face. Nikolayev had arrived at the camp with the tanks which had liberated it. He had been left here with a handful of men from the Seventh Department with instructions from Front headquarters to take charge and sort things out.

Apparently he had already sorted a few things out and taken some organisational measures. He had sent for field kitchens and organised the food supply. First-aid posts had been set up in each block, staffed by army doctors from the reserve. From among the prisoners themselves he had organised a team to help capture some of the SS guards, master executioners, and camp administrators. Most, of course, had managed to flee. The head of the camp, SS haupsturmführer Rudolf Höss, was said to have made good his escape together with his family, abandoning his house and possessions, but some of his accomplices had been caught at the camp by the sudden arrival of our tanks. Now they were dressed in prison clothes and trying to hide among the many thousands of prisoners.

"Look how many skins we discovered in all kinds of places," said Nikolayev, pointing to a corner of the room where there was a pile of jackets made of a greenish leather, black SS uniforms with two flashes of lighting on each lapel. "All kinds of places. He slips out of his uniform, gets into prison overalls—and disappears. Then see if you can find him! There are over a hundred thousand people here. But we'll get them in the end. The prisoners are helping us."

"How many have you caught?"

"Twenty-eight. But there are probably hundreds. Höss managed to get away, and he has about three million deaths on his head, more than the population of the Kalinin Region."

"Where are you holding them?"

"In the punishment cells, where the temperature is the same as outside. And who will criticise us for that? They built them themselves."

Nikolayev was swamped with work, in demand on every side. His small, damaged right eye, which always gazed out at the world with cheerful irony, was simply closing with weariness, and now correspondents had arrived.

"Look, lads," he said in a hoarse, cracked voice, "I signalled you, and now don't ask for any more. Surely you can see I have other things to do. Look around, take notes or," and he nodded his head towards a tall, bony man standing next to him, "ask Comrade Antonin to be your Virgil in your journey through this hell. Over the last two years he's visited every circle."

Antonin was a Czech, a former trade union worker from Kladno and an old Communist. He had been to Moscow and spoke Russian. Now he was something akin to a commissar in the anti-Nazi camp committee. He was a business-like man with a long, pale face and so thin that the striped camp uniform billowed about him as he walked, but he looked out at the world with bright, animated eyes set within dark sockets. Once he himself had written occasionally for *Rudé právo*, and knew the nature of newspaper work. Behind the two rows of two-storey buildings which were usually shown to foreign visitors and representatives of international organisations who had come to see the condition of the prisoners, and where tolerable conditions had been created for some of the camp inmates, there stood endless rows of wooden one-storey barracks, half sunk in the ground, without stoves, without ventilation, where people lay on three-tier bunks like sardines in a tin.

We came to a huge barn, a storeroom about as large as a medium-sized hangar. Here they had stored the hair of those who had been sent to the crematorium stoves. It was stored neatly, strictly sorted—long, average, short. Then subdivided according to colour—blond, brown, dark, chestnut. By the doors the hair simply lay heaped on the floor, while in the middle of the storeroom it was already baled, tied up, wrapped in sacking ready to be dispatched. This was no longer human hair but a valuable raw material for industry.

Then came another storeroom for articles of clothing—mountains of shoes and slippers, boots, leggings and gauntlets. Here there were the patched lace-up boots of the elderly, infant bootees, and elegant ladies' shoes.

"If those who once walked in this footwear were to suddenly rise up out of the ash, the streets of the camp would be jammed," said Antonin.

The main storeroom for the clothes of the executed was locked and under guard. There had been cases of infection, and the camp committee had forbidden access and set its own guards...

It felt strange to wander through this Nazi hell, well-organised, ordered. I walked around and could not free myself from the feeling that it was all a nightmarish dream. It was not the piles of human hair, not the piles of boots, or the dental bridges and crowns torn from the mouths of the dead and stored in safes which was the most hideous, but the business-like efficiency with which these by-products of the death industry were sorted, the organised and careful packaging. Here the prisoner was not a human being but served as raw material for some accursed industrial enter-

prise. These were the by-products of manufacture, scrap from which something could also be produced and for which money was paid.

"We found the accounts in the offices," our Virgil told us, "and there everything is written down—tonnes of hair, tonnes of clothing... There's even a record of how many women prisoners have been sent to chemical firms to 'carry out special experiments' with new preparations. How many items and the price. That's how it's written in the accounts: an assignment of goods comprising so many items... We've handed the books over to your command..."

Antonin drew our attention to long piles of concrete heaped up by explosions. Fresh, recent ruins.

"That was the most dreadful thing of all," he said. "The laboratories where doctors and pharmacists carried out experiments on people. We considered that to be more hideous than death. The laboratories were under special guard, and even the SS men had to have special passes. Those who were chosen for the experiments were never seen again. When the experiments were over, they were taken away at night straight to a second crematorium which was operated by the SS. They were held over there," Antonin pointed to another long ruin which we could see on the other side of the fence. "The doctors who carried out the experiments came and left in special cars with curtained windows."

"How many people had been tortured in these laboratories?"

"No one knows. For the moment at least. When your tanks were approaching, the SS men blew these buildings up. Some say they even destroyed those of their own men who could have told anything. But that's merely supposition, rumour. Wolf doesn't eat wolf."

Finally Antonin took us to the children's barracks. This was probably the worst of all that he showed us. There were children of all ages, and they had also been subjected to experiments of some kind. In the rush of evacuation, the Nazis had somehow forgotten about the children. Here they were, some two hundred boys and girls of different age, with old faces, sitting and lying on bunks in their little striped gowns and accompanying us with the indifferent, withdrawn eyes of those who no longer place any trust in anyone.

"They don't answer in any language," was the desolate response of a woman doctor, a captain in the military medical service. "We still haven't discovered what was done to them. Also experiments of some kind. They were given intravenous injections. There's a large number of twins,

During the combat operations on Czechoslovak territory in 1944-1945, over 140,000 Soviet troops died as heroes.

brothers and sisters. I could be mistaken, its merely a guess on my part, but I think they were looking for methods of increasing population growth." Judging by the medals and badges awarded for being wounded on duty, she was an experienced soldier. Here, however, in this child's circle of the Oswięcim hell, she had clearly lost her bearings. She was smoking cigarette after cigarette. "Good God, how horrible! If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I would never have believed it possible, not in a nightmare but in reality!"

There were always a lot of people in Nikolayev's room, and in the first stube building in general. They had caught several SS men, including a woman in black uniform who had been in charge of those horrific storerooms. Committees representing different nationalities—Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, Jewish, French, Hungarian—were sitting in various rooms... On the first floor several former prisoners, jewellers by profession, were drawing up an inventory of the latest discovery. Prior to cremation, gold and platinum crowns and bridges were removed from the mouths of the victims. They were searched for all kinds of valuables: rings, earrings, bracelets, gold coins, which the prisoners, still hoping to recover their freedom, had sometimes hidden in the most unlikely places, occasionally even swallowing them. All of this was periodically dispatched from the camp to the Reichsbank as it accumulated, and the camp bosses had packed what still remained into suitcases. They had planned to take them on leaving, but had barely had time to escape themselves. The suitcases had been abandoned. Now an inventory was being made of this grotesque discovery.

We stayed at the camp until close to nightfall. Petrovich was supposed to come for us the next morning, and we had agreed to wait for him at the commandant's office. But where were we to spend the night? Antonin suggested that we could use the small house that had belonged to the camp chief, Rudolf Höss. We had already visited it, and had been amazed to discover that one of the worst Nazi criminals, a man who had destroyed millions of people, led the modest life of an average citizen: neat little rooms with furniture that was clearly not new, with embroidered head and armrests on the covered armchairs and settees. On the walls hung plaques with edifying sayings: "Born of God, live with God", "Do not hurry, every step brings you closer to the grave", and even one in the bedroom which read "Twice a week harms neither you nor me"... A velvet bear sitting in the corner of the settee... A pile of stamp albums... An alpine cuckoo clock... A collection of ceramic beer tankards... The executioner had very modest possessions, and through the

window, beyond the flowering geraniums, one could see the row of square chimneys projecting from the gigantic crematorium which had belched smoke night and day...

In a word, this house offered all we needed: light, warmth and clean sheets—all at our service.

We were far from being sentimental people. Once, outside Rzhev, Krushinsky and I had spent the night quite happily in a flooded German dug-out, only to discover, after a good night's sleep, that German corpses were floating under our bunks. But to spend the night in the house of someone who had destroyed around three million people! No, Comrade Antonin, that we were unable to do...

We found another, perfectly satisfactory solution thanks to Andrzej Knyp, a railway workers' trade union representative who had come to see Nikolayev about restoring the camp's railway communication. Having accidentally overheard our conversation, he suddenly suggested that we might like to spend the night with him, not far away, at the edge of the camp. He had a motorcycle with a sidecar, and could take two rather thin gentlemen such as ourselves. And his wife, he said, would be happy to offer accommodation to officers of the heroic Red Army...

The Russians

...I called at an army hospital to get something for angina, and bumped into a young and rather talkative doctor who, it seemed, also did a little writing, and heard from him the story of a patient who was convalescing in the hospital after an operation.

This dramatic little story had taken place quite recently, during our offensive in Upper Silesia with four young Russians whom fate had brought together by very different routes. Vladimir Chesnokov had been a fitter at the Kursk power-station. He had been called up, fought in the battle for Moscow, was wounded, and then returned to active service. He was wounded a second time while fighting near Orel, and this time he was less fortunate. He had been taken prisoner and sent to work here, in Silesia, in the industrial town of Oppeln. Stepan Zarubin was a fitter-gauger from the machine-building plant in Orel. He had been working on the dismantling of equipment at the plant when the ring of Nazi troops closed around the city, and he was sent as an Ostarbeiter to Oppeln, to the same factory as Chesnokov. Gennady Suslov, a mechanical engineer, had fallen ill with scurvy during that hungry winter, given way to the promises

of German propaganda and volunteered for work in Germany.

The fourth, Vladimir Sibirko, was also a Russian but was born in Paris into an émigré family. He had worked as a conveyer operator at the Citroën factory, and been sent to the factory at Oppeln as an Westarbeiter.

They had met up at the transit camp in the town in Neustadt, which served as a conscript labour market. There they had struck up an acquaintance, become friends, and tried to get themselves assigned to the same factory. This proved to be not so very difficult for they all possessed skills that were in demand. They were put together in the same barracks, and as the factory produced, among other things, six-barrel mortars and ammunition, the four friends joined in the secret sabotage organised by the conscript workers, each according to his particular skill. This sabotage involved others, but for the moment we will speak of these four.

The regime at the factory was exceptionally strict. Anyone suspected of sabotage was seized and disappeared without trace. However, our friends used their wits. Chesnokov worked at the power-station, and the frequent turbine breakdowns were his work. On one occasion he succeeded in damaging the apparatus to such an extent that the main workshops came to a halt. Zarubin, who worked in repairs, was in the good books of the German administration. He carried out the repair work quickly, reliably—but while carrying out repairs in one place, was damaging something somewhere else.

Suslov and Vladimir Sibirko did what they could to disrupt the conveyer. Month in, month out, this relentless secret war was waged by those who refused to accept defeat, but each waged it alone, at his own risk, not trusting even his bunk neighbour. Our four friends consulted only among themselves.

When rumours began to circulate in the factory that the Red Army was approaching, that the German line of defence along the Vistula, which Goebbels had called "the impregnable citadel of Germany", was broken, the four friends decided to take more resolute action. The administration had been ordered to load the Ostarbeiters onto trains, but gunfire could already be heard in the distance. Russian attack planes could be seen over the town and the roads leading to it, firing on the columns and the freight trains waiting to be loaded. There was panic at the factory. It was now that the four decided to act, and worked out a plan.

Suslov's work-team began a fight, drawing in the factory guards and putting them out of action. They then took their

weapons, and a revolt began to the accompaniment of approaching gunfire. The German workers took no part in it, but also did nothing to stop it. It was the work of the West- and Ostarbeiters.

Stepan Zarubin found a red signal flag in the cabin of one of the railway workers, climbed up a factory chimney and tied it to the lightning conductor. He was the first to be shot down by soldiers from the military commandant's office, who had been brought in to help the disarmed guards. He was killed instantly, but the flag continued to fly over the factory and the town. The spontaneous revolt was developing into a battle.

The rebels barricaded themselves in the workshop and fired through the windows. The soldiers dragged a couple of guns into the factory yard and shot open the barricaded doors. The workers fought in the narrow passages of the workshop with iron bars and blocks of pig iron. However incredible it may seem, the workers, encouraged by the sound of the approaching gunfire from Soviet tanks, held their own until the Soviet tanks arrived.

Vladimir Sibirko fell in this battle while defending the stairway. Engineer Suslov, wounded in the leg, continued to fire out of the window, and let go of his rifle only when a bullet struck him in the forehead.

Only one of the four friends, Vladimir Chesnokov, survived. Wounded in the shoulder, he was now convalescing in a military hospital, under treatment from the doctor who was telling me this story.

Shortly afterwards, having been sent for by the doctor, Vladimir Chesnokov, his dark, curly hair giving him the appearance of a Gypsy, came to the doctor's office, and together we discussed the details of this little odyssey of four Russians.

"Did many lose their lives in that battle?"

"Who was there to count? Each died alone. And there were Germans among us, quite a few towards the end. There were a lot of good people in Silesia. Working class born and bred. And among our own there were those who betrayed us. But only a few, the odd rotten apple."

"Well, the doctor says you're back on your feet, and that you'll be discharged very soon. What are you planning to do?"

"What do you mean?" Chesnokov asked, rather offended, and shook his ruffled mop of hair. "What do you mean? Fight, of course. There's still some fighting left to do, isn't there?"

1968-1971

YEVGENI VINOKUROV

Muscovites

Yevgeni Vinokurov (b. 1925) — Soviet poet. During the war he served with the artillery. He is the author of the books *The Face of Man* (1960), *The Word* (1962) and *Contrasts* (1975). Vinokurov's poetry is philosophical, and the war appears in the form of recollections and reflections linking the past and the present.

The poem *In the Fields Beyond the calm Vistula...* set to music by the Soviet composer Andrei Eshpai, has become a well-known song.

In the fields beyond the calm Vistula
They lie in the earth damp and dire,
Seryozha from Malaya Bronnaya,
And Vitka from Mokhovaya.

And somewhere mid living mortals
For many years in a row
Alone in their empty quarters
Their mothers lie sleepless now.

The lights of the lamps that burn there
Over Moscow blaze like fire
In the windows of Malaya Bronnaya,
In the windows of Mokhovaya.

They'll never return. Without them
The cinemas go on with the show.
The girls who were their friends then
Are all married long ago.

The night is rustling its branches,
The heavens with stars are afire
Over quiet Malaya Bronnaya,
Over quiet Mokhovaya.

1953

© Yevgeni Vinokurov, "Muscovites" in *Let the Living Remember...*, pp. 355-357.

VLADIMIR BOGOMOLOV

Zosia

1

I was nothing but a boy then, full of dreams; there were so many things I didn't understand.

After a month of fierce offensive battles—in forests, in sand and swamps—after a month of inhuman strain, and hundreds of deaths, when we had advanced all the way to Poland, and were somewhere near Bialy Stok with only a handful of men remaining in our bled-white battalion, we were suddenly taken off the front-line under cover of night and sent to the rear for rest and reinforcement.

And so what was left of our motorized infantry battalion found itself in a small and no doubt quite ordinary Polish village called Nowy Dwór.

After sleeping one entire day I awoke on a fine July morning. The sun was up already; there was a smell of honey and apples, and an overwhelming silence reigned. It was all so unaccustomed that I spent several seconds staring at my surroundings before I realised what had happened and where I was.

Our shovel-snouted Dodge stood in an orchard, under a tall and spreading pear-tree, beside the rear wall of a large and prosperous-looking peasant house. In the hay beside me on the truck-bed, his rain-cloak pulled over his head, slept my friend Senior Lieutenant Victor Baikov. Just half a month before he and I had been mere company commanders, but after a direct mortar hit on our headquarters Victor had assumed the duties of battalion commander, and I became his chief of staff—or more precisely, adjutant.

© Vladimir Bogomolov, *The Aching in My Heart*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1982, pp. 90-142.

Vladimir Bogomolov (b. 1926)—Soviet prose writer. During the war he served first as a private, then as an intelligence officer. Although seriously wounded several times, he always returned to active service. It is not surprising, therefore, that his work as a writer is devoted to the events of the last war.

Bogomolov's first short story, "Ivan" (1958), was the basis for the film *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), made by the film director Andrei Tarkovsky. Thereafter he wrote the short stories "First Love" (1959), "A Cemetery Near Belostok", "Grade 'B' ", "People Everywhere", "In the Same Ward", "The Aching in My Heart" (all written in 1964), and others, and also the well-known novel *In the August of Forty-Four...* (1974).

I jumped down onto the grass, stretched, and strolled up and down alongside the truck.

Seated on the ground by the tailgate, clasping a submachine-gun with both hands, slept our sentry, a youthful radio operator with a bandage-swathed head. In the last week the shortage of personnel had forced us to keep most of the lightly wounded in action; some, in fact, were themselves unwilling to leave the battalion.

I looked into his dirty, haggard face and shooed away the fat flies crawling along the dark spot of blood that showed through the bandage. He was sleeping so soundly and sweetly that I did not have the heart to wake him.

Under a captured blanket in a corner of the truck-bed I found the food Victor's orderly had prepared. I ate a hunk of rye bread with great appetite, and washed it down with a whole jug of baked milk. Then I took a little book of poems—Yesenin, with a cover made from a scrap of oilcloth—out of my haversack, I got half a cake of harsh soap out of Victor's bag, found a gap in the fence, and crawled through it into the street.

The cobblestoned road ran through the village lengthwise. A little way off to the right it disappeared around a corner; to the left it crossed a wooden bridge over a narrow stream. I made for the stream.

From the bridge the sandy bottom, lit by the sun, was visible down to the tiniest pebbles through the crystal-clear water. Schools of fish with silvery shining scales glided and darted about everywhere. An enormous black crayfish was crawling from one bank over towards the other, waving his long antennae, leaving behind a track of minute furrows.

About seventy paces downstream three men stood waist-deep in the water, their backs to the bridge. They were bent over intent on some task. One of them I recognised as Zelenko, the battalion's favourite, an accordion player and grenade thrower who had destroyed four enemy tanks during the battles on Dnieper alone. They were talking quietly, groping among the snags and along the banks: they were after crayfish, or maybe fish.

They had laundered their uniforms and hung them to dry on the branches of nearby willow. There too, on the bank, two mess-tins were suspended over a small fire; on an outspread greatcoat I could see a can, some earthenware pots, a load of bread, and a little heap of cucumbers.

The men were wholly absorbed in their fishing; I did not call to them. That morning I wanted more than anything

else to be alone. I went down to the stream on the other side of the road, and followed the path along the bank.

It was turning into a splendid day. The sun shone and warmed, but did not scorch mercilessly as it had all the last week. A fresh, strong aroma of honey-laden flowers and dew rose from the tall, succulent grass in the meadow, from the earth itself. Grasshoppers trilled merrily and steadily, in admirable harmony, through the silence.

Pale-blue dragonflies, flashing bits of mother-of-pearls, hovered directly over the mirror-like water and above the bank. I tried, without luck, to catch one so I could get a closer look.

It was pleasure to breathe that marvellous, sweet-scented air. I walked slowly along the bank, examining everything around me and rejoicing in it.

How fast life can change! It seemed simply incredible that not long ago I had crouched, tormented by heat, tension, and thirst, in a machine-gun nest on Elevation 114 (I was a good shot; in battle I took the machine-gun whenever possible), firing short bursts, mowing down Germans—all of them strapping fellows—from the Feldherrnhalle, a grenadier tank division of the SS, as they stubbornly dodged and crept up the slope.

It was somehow impossible to believe that just a short while back, when the cartridges had run out and there were no more grenades, and about thirty Germans had rushed over the top and into our trenches, I had gone berserk after a blow from a submachine-gun stock on my helmet and fought hand-to-hand armed with the spare barrel for the machine-gun; exhausted, panting, I rolled over and over on the ground with a hefty SS man who was trying, rather successfully, to strangle me; and then, when they finished him off, grabbed a shovel and used it to cut down another German, who was carrying a flamethrower.

All that had been two days before; but I had slept for one whole day, and just woken up. For that reason, and because of the overpowering impression the battle had left, it all seemed to have happened just a few hours earlier.

I opened my book as I strolled along, and was about to begin reading aloud to myself. But then I decided to get all the less pleasant, but necessary, tasks taken care of first. On a little sandy beach I kicked off my boots, undressed quickly, and gave two vigorous washings to my tunic and trousers—they were soaked with sweat, dust, gun oil, and someone's blood—and to my foot-cloths and cap, which were literally black. After wringing these things out thoroughly I hung them on the branches of a hazel-nut bush to dry. Then I got

into the water, rinsed out my improvised bathing trunks, and set to washing myself. After soaping up I dug at my scalp with my nails, going at it with a luxurious ferocity, and then scraped and rubbed my skin with sand until it was red and in places scratched. It had been three weeks since my last real bath, and the water around me immediately turned murky-dark, as it had when I laundered my clothes.

Afterwards I swam. I dived with open eyes and chased schools of fry through the clear water. I gathered shells and bright pebbles from the sandy bottom, picking out the prettiest and most interesting of them. I had decided to put together a small collection while we were billeted there. Back home, on the outskirts of Moscow, I had a whole trunkful of unusual pebbles and shells of all kinds stored away; my passion for collecting them went back to early childhood.

After a while I climbed back onto the bank, feeling greatly refreshed. There was a pleasant lightness all through my body; it was as if I had been re-born. I turned over my tunic and trousers, which were drying quickly on the branches of the bush. Finally, conscience at ease, I picked up my book.

I loved poetry, and read it at every opportunity, but it was only recently I had discovered Yesenin[1]. At the beginning of the campaign I had found a one-volume selection of his poems in some ruins outside Mogilev; the book astonished and enchanted me.

On the front-line I had often, with hunger and delight, read snatches from it, often finding in it confirmation of my own ideas and longings. I already knew many of the quatrains by heart, and would recite them, usually to myself, whether or not they were apropos. But I had not yet had an opportunity to give myself up entirely, in quiet surroundings, to Yesenin's poetry.

I began saying the poems over, at times from the book, at times from memory. I started with the early, youthful ones.

Dear furrows and fields, in your sorrow
As noble and fine as before!
I love, too, these tumbledown cottages
Where grey mothers wait by the door.

Hey, Russia, my kind mother country,
Your loving son ever I'll stay.
How gaily your meadows with laughter
*In springtime re-echo all day.**[2]

* Translated by Peter Tempest.

The bright river between banks overgrown with willows, the new-mown meadow with its ricks of green hay, the young birches beyond it, the golden rye reaching right to the horizon, even the sky, brilliant blue with feathery wisps of cloud—all of it reminded me achingly of the immemorial Russian heartland, and especially of the little village outside Moscow where my mother was born and where most of my childhood passed. Everything around me was in striking harmony with Yesenin's verses, with his ecstatic love for his own little corner of Russia, for its expanses of field and meadow, for its nature and people.

I read—or rather, declaimed—with great emotion; one hand waving, I repeated once again, and then a third time, the part I liked best:

Many thoughts in silence I've been thinking,
Many songs about myself I've penned,
And upon this earth grim and forbidding
I am glad I breathed and my life spent.

I am happy that I have kissed women,
Picked wild flowers and in soft grass lain,
And that beasts, who are our younger brothers,
*I have never beaten, never slain.**

Oh, how grand that was, how fine! I read on and on, drinking in great gulps of poetry; it moved me to tears. I was oblivious to everything else.

...O Life, were you real, or of fancy born?
It's as if in spring I've been out riding
*On a pink horse in the vibrant dawn.**

I was under a spell, in a world of my own. I have no idea what it was that made me turn round: behind me, between two bushes, a girl stood looking at me curiously. She was about seventeen, not tall, and unusually pretty.

She was not laughing. No—her face showed only curiosity or interest. But I thought I could see sparks of laughter in her eyes, which were greenish, shining, and mysterious.

I was overcome with embarrassment, and at that very instant she disappeared. I had a glimpse of small, bare feet and a strong, well-proportioned figure under a faded dress she had obviously outgrown. There was just enough time to notice the basket on her arm.

* Translated by Peter Tempest.

She had appeared out of nowhere and vanished suddenly and silently, like a fairy-tale vision. But of course I did not believe in miracles; it even seemed to me that she must be hiding in the bushes. Hastily I pulled on my trousers—no doubt I had been a comical sight, declaiming verses in the bathing trunks I had improvised from material intended for foot-cloths. I hunted all through the bushes without finding the girl or any visible trace of her.

Deep in thought, I returned to the bank of the sream and opened my book. I wanted to go back to my reading, but could not; it seemed something was missing. What sort of nonsense was this? What could possibly be missing? Then suddenly it came to me, clear as the day, that I wanted very much to see that girl again—if only for a minute, if only with one eye.

I hid for a while under a bush, listening, hoping she would re-appear. Why shouldn't she come back? Was I going to eat her, or harm her in some way?

The birds chirped quietly, with a spring-time gladness; in the grass the incessant insect trill continued. But try as I might I could hear no footsteps, not even a rustle.

What I did hear was the sound of an engine, distant, but getting nearer. A minute or so later, looking round, I saw a jeep cross slowly over the bridge; I recognised the officer in the front seat as the commander of our brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel Antonov. I had a vivid idea of what would happen if he caught both the sentry and the battalion commander sleeping. In a feverish hurry I finished dressing and pulled on my boots. The jacket and trousers were still damp in places; I tugged at them, trying to smooth them out a little, and rushed at full speed towards the village. I was hoping desperately that the brigade commander would pass us by, headed for some other battalion, or that he would not see our Dodge and go all the way down to the far end of the village, so that I could manage to get there in time. But when I got out into the village street I saw his car parked in front of the house where we were staying.

I had not got as far as the gate when the lieutenant-colonel appeared from the yard. He was a tall man, and cut a dashing figure: fresh, carefully ironed trousers, medal insignia on his tunic, a cap that looked brand-new, and boots shined to a brilliant lustre. An artificial hand in a tight glove of sleek black leather hung motionless from his left sleeve. He was about thirty-five, but to me, at nineteen, he seemed elderly, if not actually old.

In Poland, 600,000 Soviet soldiers sacrificed their lives liberating that country.

He ordered his driver to go on, and silently returned my salute, raising his hand to his hat. Throwing a swift, scowling look over me, he inquired:

"Has a cow been chewing at you, by some chance? Don't you have anywhere to get things ironed?" He took the book out of my hands, opened it with two strong, deft fingers, looked into it, and gave it back.

At that minute Victor came hurrying out through the gate, buttoning his collar and rubbing his eyes. He peered about sleepily. He was without his cap and beltless, dirty and unshaven.

"Marvellous!" exclaimed the lieutenant-colonel. "The battalion commander dead asleep, the chief of staff reading pretty verses, and the men left to themselves! No guard posted, just one sentry—and he's asleep. This is a farce! Unthinkable irresponsibility!"

Victor stared at me in incomprehension and dismay. Only then did I remember: the night before last, as we piled into the truck about four kilometres from the front-line, he had ordered me to post a guard when we arrived and to draw up a plan of action in case of enemy attack. But the men were on the point of collapse from exhaustion, and no German attack was expected. (They were fighting back ferociously, and even making counter-attacks, but only over short distances, to cover themselves.) What is more, I had been able to see, as we travelled to the rear, that there were units of the second echelon between the front-line and Nowy Dwór, which would protect us from sudden attack. With these assurances, unable to hold back any longer, I had sunk at once into sleep.

There could be no doubt that I alone was to blame, but I did not dare say so; the brigade commander did not like excuses, and would not tolerate argument. It was thought that if he was displeased the best thing to do was to keep silent. The fault was mine, but it was Victor who would be held responsible, and I knew that no matter how hard it went for him he would not say a word against me.

We stood before the brigade commander: I at attention, face red, looking at him guiltily; Victor with his head down like a bull about to charge.

"What is the reason for this? Explain yourselves!" the lieutenant-colonel demanded after a short pause. "Is the war over, perhaps?" he asked without smiling. "In that case you would do well to notify your commanding officers; they would be glad to hear the news!"

After another pause he declared angrily:

"You can still fight, but take you out of battle and you're

not worth a damned thing! One of you sleeping, the other off somewhere reading poetry, and your men undress in the middle of the village and go in for a dip, as if they were at a beach! No doubt they're drinking vodka, too!"

"The men are exhausted," Victor brought out in a hoarse voice, although he should have kept quiet. "They deserve some rest."

"This isn't rest, it's demoralisation!" roared the brigade commander. "You are inexperienced. You fail to understand elementary truths. Inactivity ruins an army. It may be we'll stay here a month and a half, or even two, waiting for our equipment and reinforcements arrive. What are you going to do, just lie around and loaf? You'll wreck this whole battalion! Starting tomorrow, two hours of drill every morning for all personnel! And three hours study of regulations and tactics—every day!"

From the depths of the courtyard came a sharp, unpleasant creak. The door of the big threshing barn swung open, and out of the darkness emerged Lieutenant Karev, the third of the battalion's surviving officers, who had just been made commander of a company. What a moment he had chosen to creep out! He stood on the grass in just his trousers, a long-legged skinny youngster, squinting in the sun. He did not see us. Smiling, he raised his arms over his head and thrust out his chest.

"See baby stretch!" the lieutenant-colonel hissed, holding back his anger. "What is your plan of action in case of enemy attack? Have you given any thought to security?"

Victor snorted, and hurled a furious look at me from under his brows; an angry knot slid across the hollow of his cheek.

"I am asking the two of you. Have you provided for security?"

"Y-you understand, C-comrade Colonel," I stammered and fell silent.

"We don't have any plan," said Victor grimly. "And no security provisions have been made either." He was not one to beat about the bush. "It was my oversight. I am responsible."

"I am dissatisfied with you," the lieutenant-colonel said to Victor in a masterful, angry voice; these words were his most extreme expression of disapproval. After a moment he turned to me: "Here you are, amusing yourself. Have you dispatched the reports required upon withdrawing from battle? Have you made out the death notices? The casualty lists?"

I made no answer. I felt utterly guilty.

"I'm giving you one hour. Post a guard, get things in order, and report to me."

After a short pause he added:

"Make things as comfortable for the men as possible. Augmented portions at dinner this afternoon. Pick up and distribute to all personnel one hundred grammes of vodka each. But no sprees, and no women!"

He lifted his hand smartly to his cap, but as he turned to go, instead of the expected "Proceed!" he barked: "Rest!"

Victor and I watched as he went towards his car with firm, quick steps. He got in, and the jeep rolled off and vanished round the corner.

Victor looked at me and at the volume of Yesenin in my hand. "You milksop," he sputtered, literally trembling with rage. Then came the words I had already heard from him more than once when my reading poetry had resulted in some lapse in the performance of duty; they were angry words, laden with an indescribable scorn: "Pure poppycock! Namby-pamby sentimentalism!"

2

About ten minutes later I was sitting at a little table in the garden hurriedly writing up documents. Unfortunately I was almost completely unfamiliar with battalion paperwork, and to make things worse I had a dislike for all sorts of written work that went back to childhood. But both our clerks had been killed; I would have to spend several days grinding away.

A master artillery sergeant and four other sergeants—our non-commissioned officers—reported in answer to an urgent summons. Lieutenant Karev came over too. Without looking up from my writing I informed them that they must immediately post a guard, make up reports according to three forms, detail a field kitchen, and send a car round to the brigade supply depot. As I expected, they began to argue: there were fourteen men left in one company and only five in another, two of them wounded; the men were catching up on their sleep, bathing, washing and drying their uniforms, and so on and so forth. A noisy squabble started up, but Victor pulled them up harshly and at once they all fell silent.

He stood shaving beside the truck, looking into the mirror and humming, or rather droning, some march tune—a sure sign that he was in a bad temper. Feeling guilty before him I struggled to get the reports ready in a hurry.

He did not say another word to me, but his orderly, Semyonov—a savvy soldier of unusual courage, but prone to insubordination—felt the sting of his wrath. He had been stationed as a sentry alongside the staff car, and he started munching apples at his post. Another day Victor would have simply ignored this, but now he gave Semyonov a piece of his mind, and threatened to make him "peel potatoes in the mess for a month".

I had dismissed the NCOs, having given the necessary orders, and gone back to my work when I heard a pleasant, melodious voice singing in Polish. I was startled to see that it was the girl I had caught a glimpse of in the bushes by the river.

She walked along the path through the orchard swinging a basket on her arm, stepping neatly and gracefully with her little sun-tanned feet as if she were doing a dance, and singing gaily. She pretended not to notice us.

The piece of bread Victor had raised to his mouth—he was finishing his breakfast—dropped back to his side; he stared after the girl like a man bewitched.

"Who's that?" he asked, mouth still full, as soon as she had gone around the corner of the house. "Semyonov, who was that?"

"You mean the daughter of the woman who lives here?" Semyonov answered sullenly.

"Ah so," said Victor slowly. I could tell by his voice and face that the girl had made a great impression on him; my heart filled with dismay.

Victor was older, and incomparably more striking and personable than I was. He had had several women already, and considered himself an inveterate heartbreaker—and so he seemed to me too.

"Cities are taken by bravery," he would say seriously and significantly. "Women, by brazenness."

He pronounced these words with an expression that implied he had grasped some deep mystery, something neither I nor the others in his audience would ever comprehend.

I do not know where he heard that phrase, whom he borrowed it from. He said it, and I believed it.

Now, many years afterwards, I see clearly that Victor was no ladies' man; he probably did not even know how to be brazen—it would not have been in his character. No doubt easy success with two or three lonely women he had chanced to meet during the war had gone to his head, given him an excess of masculine self-confidence. But back then I did not understand any of this. I was convinced that he was irresistible, that he would inevitably be given preference.

That was why I was so pained to see the impression the girl had made on him.

With a gloomy face he signed the documents I had ready, and at my request wrote his signature on several sheets of blank paper so that I could send off the most urgent reports even in his absence. Having done this he left for one of the subunits.

He returned several hours later, after noon. In all that time I had not once looked up from my work. Because of my inexperience I kept getting confused, and had to recopy what I had already written. At last I dispatched two reports to brigade headquarters by motorcycle, and received in answer orders to submit at once reports according to five more forms, and to describe "all measures taken for camouflage, preservation of military secrets, anti-aircraft defence, anti-chemical defence, and anti-tank defence". I sank into utter despair. Our battalion had earlier employed three or four men in handling the endless paper-shuffling that engulfs headquarters units upon withdrawal from battle. They had barely managed to cope with the load that had now descended on me alone. My hand cramped and went numb, my head ached, I had trouble understanding even the simpliest things. I felt that the work was too much for me, but there was no hope of aid: any soldier or sergeant I might want to take on as a helper would have to be cleared for secret work; Victor and Karev were busy with the men.

I envied them with all my soul. I longed to stretch my legs, to wander book in hand through the rye fields beyond the village, to swim, to sunbathe on the river bank. Instead I sat like a galley slave and agonised over my writing, doing many of the reports over and over. Meanwhile Zosia—that was the girl's name—was busy helping her mother with the household chores. I could hear her clear voice over by the house, then in the garden, then somewhere very close by—behind me, or off to the side.

Again and again she walked or ran through the orchard, humming to herself, dodging nimbly through the branches. Each time my eyes would follow her light figure until it disappeared, and I would promise myself not to be distracted again. But when she came into sight again a little later, the same thing would happen all over.

Her mother was *Pani* Julia, a grey-haired woman of about forty-five with a kind, youthful face and tired, puffy eyes. She did her laundry in the shade of the house, and then went out into the garden with her daughter. I could hear their quiet voices, Zosia's merry and full of life, her mother's slow and muffled.

At noon *Pani* Julia brought out a nearly full jug of fresh, warm milk. She said something, and put it on my table. I pronounced the words of thanks I had carefully learned, "Bardzo dziękujem". When she had gone I drank some of it—it was delicious. I left more than half of it for Victor.

He returned in a good mood, full—as always—of energy and a thirst for action. He was as friendly as if nothing at all had happened that morning, as if the brigade commander had never taken him to task through my fault. He came up to my table and set two ripe yellow apples on it. Someone had treated him, evidently, and he had saved some for me. While I ate he squatted down beside me and described with great enthusiasm the sumptuous meal he had organised in the battalion mess. Laughing, he told me that some of the men had not even come to eat it; there was plenty to eat in the village, and everyone was tired of food boiled in the common kettle.

Thereupon he offered to make his favourite dish—Siberian *pelmeni*. He jumped up and sent Semyonov off on a motorcycle to get hold of some flour and meat. He himself, after brushing the dust of his boots, went into the house to get acquainted with our hosts.

About five minutes later I saw him out in the yard by the woodpile; he had taken off his belt and tunic, and was busy chopping firewood.

You could tell he had been accustomed from childhood to every kind of farm chore. He was agile and broad-chested, and literally strong as a bear. He went through the little pile of logs quickly and easily, splitting them open like sunflower seeds, and helped *Pani* Julia stack the neat quarters. Then, while he waited for Semyonov, he sat in the yard where everyone could see him and lovingly tuned his guitar, plucking at the strings quietly, intent and self-important.

The instrument was his pride and joy, an expensive bauble captured in the blindage of a German general: a concert quitar with exquisite mother-of-pearl encrustations, made by the famous Viennese craftsman Leopold Schenk himself—his name, together with three medals, was stamped in gold along the lower edge of the sound hole.

It was an instrument of rare beauty and tone, and Victor cherished it jealously. He would not willingly let even his friends handle it, and this had more than once earned him a good-natured ragging. In time of battle the guitar was kept in the battalion's supply store, locked in a special case and swathed, for still greater protection, in captured blankets.

I heard Semyonov return; Victor expressed approval of the meat he had brought. About an hour later, when I went up to the house to get Victor's signature for some papers, preparations were in full swing.

Pani Julia was making a salad of cucumbers and radishes, with a sour-cream dressing. Victor, assisted by Semyonov and Zosia, was making quick work of fixing the *pelmeni*. Something was already steaming or stewing on the broad tile stove.

Zosia was rolling bits of cut dough out into little thin pancakes; Semyonov was putting the meat through the grinder for a second or third time, to make it more tender.

Victor, with a clean handkerchief on his head in place of a chef's hat, was managing somehow to supervise, hurry things along, and give encouragement while performing the most difficult and responsible job himself: with the tip of his knife he deftly placed bits of ground meat onto the rolled-out pancakes; having thus prepared several rows, he pinched the edges together with fleet, nimble fingers.

I thought it best not to go in; Victor took the papers and signed them on the window sill.

"Is there much more?" he asked.

"Enough," I answered with a sigh, watching Zosia's busily working hands out of the corner of my eye.

"Well, wind it up," he ordered, glancing at his watch. In a mock-official tone he announced: "There will be a dinner with augmented portions at sixteen-thirty hours. Full-dress uniforms. Attendance is mandatory for all staff officers." He raised his hand playfully to the handkerchief on his head: "Carry on!"

3

I was the last to arrive. The hosts and other guests were already seated in the large, comparatively cool room at a table laid in holiday fashion with food and drink. Besides Karev, Semyonov, and me there were three other guests: Stefan, who was *Pani* Julia's first cousin—a thin old man with an aquiline nose, a droopy mustache like a Cossack's, and bright blue eyes in a sunburned face; a neighbour woman with reddish-grey hair who sat unsmiling, barely saying five words in the course of the meal, and looked at us with obvious mistrust; and Wanda, a young, pretty woman with shaved eyebrows, a strong body, and a high, jutting bosom.

Victor was seated in state at the head of the table. *Pani* Julia sat beside him at one hand, Stefan at the other. When

I came in the old man was telling how grim life had been under the Germans. Although their visits to Nowy Dwór were not frequent, they were sudden and quite devastating. They rummaged through houses, barns, and cellars, taking food and anything else that caught their eye. A year back they had cordoned off the village unexpectedly and rounded up all the men between seventeen and fifty-five. And when they were finally forced to retreat, they took all the horses with them—ruthlessly, every last one.

The consequences of this most recent piece of marauding seemed to concern Stefan more than anything else.

"What are we supposed to do, ah?" he asked Victor in a worried voice. "Can't plough, can't haul firewood. What now—kaput?"

He spoke Russian fluently and with no appreciable accent, frequently making apt use of colloquial expressions and old sayings. I learned later that he had been a soldier in the tsar's army for many years, had fought the Japanese in Manchuria and the Germans too, ten years later, somewhere in Galicia[3]. He would listen to whoever was talking and translated; conversation at the table was conducted mainly through him.

I sat down in the empty place between Stefan and the silent Polish woman; opposite me were Karev and Zosia.

She had put on a flowered blouse with short sleeves for the occasion; through the little opening at the neck I could see a fine silver chain, like the ones they wear crosses on. It was only later, though, that I took all of this in; at first, until I was a bit tipsy, I did not even dare raise my eyes to look at her.

For wartime the table was bountiful and extremely appetising. There were plates with salads and cucumbers, little dishes full of sour cream, two platters with pinkish slices of lard arrayed fanwise, a huge frying-pan, just taken from the stove, with new potatoes, and towering stacks of bread of two kinds—ours, issued by the army, and the hostess', baked at home and never weighed out into rations, fluffy and light-coloured. The main course—the *pelmeni*—were still to come; Victor was holding them back.

There was plenty to drink too: a pitcher of *bimber* (an aromatic and very strong liquor the Poles distill), the half-litre of vodka that Semyonov had been given for the four of us, and tall bottles of brown, foamy, home-brewed beer.

Victor's splendid guitar reposed on the chest of drawers behind Karev. Several photographs hung on the wall a little farther up; I noticed a pair of big pictures, both the same size, showing two men with strikingly similar

faces—one a youth and the other elderly, both in Polish army uniforms.

Victor poured *bimber* for himself and Stefan, and passed the pitcher to Karev. He splashed a little vodka into my glass, casually remarking that I was not quite well.

That was not true; I simply did not like to drink, and did not know how, either. Probably he was afraid I would get drunk.

"To the liberation of Poland," he said solemnly, getting to his feet glass in hand.

We drank, and started in on the food.

I was hungry, but I felt a little embarrassed, and ate in small bites, slowly and carefully, trying not to make noise and to hold the fork correctly, I had totally forgotten table manners.

Stefan continued his description of life under the Germans and their pillaging. Victor, who was going at the potatoes with a hearty appetite, listened without interrupting, but I think without any particular compassion. We had been through the Smolensk country and Byelorussia, had seen cities in ruins and villages burned to the ground, where there was not a cat—let alone a cow—to be found alive. After such awful devastation and poverty, Poland and Western Byelorussia, despite all they had suffered, could only surprise and gladden us with their relative plenty.

Victor could not bear being called "Pan", the courtly form of address used in Poland. He had managed to do a little educational work already: Stefan, in speaking to him or another one of us, would say "comrade officer", or simply "comrade".

I had drunk only a small quantity of vodka, but after downing a glassful of the strong home-brew in two gulps I began to feel a bit more self-confident, and stole a peek—and then another—over at Zosia.

No, I had not been mistaken; it was no day-dream. Everything about her was enchanting: her lovely, animated face, her fine figure, the melody of her voice, her shining, dark-green eyes, and the good-natured curiosity with which she looked at us.

Her behaviour was simple and unconstrained, as befits a hostess. She helped her mother to serve the guests, ran out to the kitchen for dishes, smiled, and even raised some *bimber* to her lips when the rest of us drank—her nose wrinkled, but she took a little swallow. Later she listened with unconcealed interest to Stefan's Russian, as if trying to discern what he was talking about and what impression his words were making on us. As she listened, her hand

wandered up to smooth her thick, chestnut-coloured hair. I was held as if spellbound by the charming, feminine gesture.

Sometimes her eyes would meet mine, for a second, sending a thrill through me: her eyes were friendly, encouraging, tender—and there was something else there too, something mysterious and exciting. It seemed to me that until that minute no one had ever given me such a look.

Karev, whose father was a professor in Leningrad, proved to be the most gallant of us. He attended to the ladies, putting food onto their plates, offering them bread, and pouring beer into their glasses. I decided to follow his example: I scooped up a big lump of salad in a table spoon, and was about to put it on Wanda's plate, but she hastily cried, "Dziękujem, nie!" in a gay voice, and reinforced her words with an energetic shake of her head. The others stared at me. In my embarrassment I brushed a tall vase full of sour cream with my sleeve and nearly overturned it. I decided right then and there not to look for any more trouble.

Victor usually got on well with people, especially simple people, and most of all with peasants. He had drunk more than one glass of *bimber* in the past half-hour, and was already talking to Stefan as if he were an old friend, sharing the old man's strong, homegrown tobacco, laughing loudly, joking, and calling him by the affectionate Russian nickname Stepa.

Karev, like the rest of us, had an extremely limited command of Polish—three or four dozen words. He was now trying to use them to converse with Zosia. She listened with a merry and slightly mischievous smile, laughing at his uncertain pronunciation. She put some questions, speaking very quickly in order to tease him. He shrugged, his face expressing a comically exaggerated incomprehension.

Victor too addressed Zosia several times, through Stefan, asking all kinds of trifling questions. He obviously wanted to start up a conversation, to get to know her better. I watched all this glumly, and decided I must certainly talk with her a little myself.

I even thought that I had a certain advantage. In my pocket was a *Brief Polish-Russian Phrase Book* I had just received from brigade headquarters. It would, of course, facilitate communication with the local people. I confess I placed no small hope in that tiny book which was about the size of an identification card.

Stealthily removing it from my pocket, I placed it on my knees and paged through it from beginning to end. There

were more than thirty short sections, and it seemed that all possible situations, not only on land but also on the sea and in the air, had been foreseen. I could, for example, inquire without the slightest difficulty or hesitation about a wide variety of things: "Do you know where the rest of the German soldiers and officers are hiding?"; "Can you tell me where the Germans placed mines in this vicinity?"; "Please show me what track the fuel cisterns are on." I could even ask: "Can the river be forded? Where? Can tanks get across?"; or "How many parachutists came down?"; or "Where did the gliders land?"

But what did I want with this welter of interrogatives?

The section that came closest to my needs was the next to last; it was titled "Conversation on General Subjects". To my great irritation, it contained only fifteen phrases, of which the most unmilitary and human were "Hello"; "Thank you"; "What is your name?"—but I had known since morning that her name was Zosia; "Have a cigarette" (All I needed was to offer her a cigarette!); "As a patriotic Pole you must help us in the struggle against our common enemy"; and "Where is the nearest hospital (pharmacy/public baths)?"

Disheartened, I hid the book away in my pocket again, telling myself I would manage somehow without it.

Whether talking or listening, Stefan watched us closely with his intelligent eyes. His look was a bit wary, as if he wanted to find out what sort of people we were, how much Russians had changed in the nearly thirty years since he had served in the tsar's army. He was probably wondering most of all what the village could expect from us.

I was slightly, pleasantly tipsy, and Zosia's friendliness had given me courage. I had begun to cast long glances towards her when, suddenly, she put me in my place: she looked directly at me, stern and cold, even a bit haughty.

I was stunned, I could not imagine any reason for such a change. What had I done? Had I made some slip?

Or was it, perhaps, just the unconscious game that the weaker half of humankind has been playing for hundreds and thousands of years with the other, stronger half? I will never know. But anyway I would have been too shy and inexperienced then to play along.

After I had spent a minute or so in total bewilderment, however, Zosia gave me another look, as friendly and spirited as earlier, and immediately I cheered up and smiled back at her.

A little while later I noticed, or thought I did, that she was looking at me more often than at Victor or Karev, and in some special way, tenderly and expectantly—as

if she wanted to talk to me about something, ask some question, but could not summon up the courage to begin. All at once, with all my being, I felt a vague but sweet hope that she was feeling the same thing as I was. It was like the beginning of something new and significant, something I had never experienced before. Already I was almost sure of it: something was happening between us.

The liquor had gradually loosened our tongues and melted away the awkwardness that had been felt earlier. Wanda, chuckling to herself about something, was staring at Victor quite openly. That was without question a mistake on her part: Victor believed men should make the advances, and women should take a purely defensive position. He did not value anything in life that was gotten without labour and effort.

Again, I caught Zosia giving me that mysterious, but somehow expectant look. A second later I felt a light, uncertain touch on my knee. My heart skipped a beat, then pounted hard and fast.

I must act. Without losing a moment, immediately!

"Cities are taken by bravery," I told myself, "women, by brazenness. No hanging back! Come on!" And with sudden decision I pushed my leg forward. Instantly Karev's face contorted with pain—his knee had been hit by shrapnel—and he looked under the table. He peered at me inquiringly.

My face blazed with embarrassment, but Zosia did not notice it, or at least pretended not to notice. A little later she said something to Stefan, and he turned to me smiling:

"Does the comrade pray to God?"

"No. Why do you ask?" I answered in surprise.

"Zosia says that the comrade was praying down by the river."

So that was what had interested her! And only that?

"It wasn't a prayer. Not at all..."

"It was poetry," Victor said. He had overheard, and guessed the truth. He looked at me reproachfully, as if to say, "See what I mean?"

It would be wrong to say that Victor did not like poetry; he simply did not understand it.

"Nonsense!" he might say, genuinely indignant. "Where did he ever see a pink horse? I'm a country boy myself! They think of the damnedest things."

Apparently Stefan did not know, or had forgotten, what the word "poetry" meant; he repeated it slowly, and shrugged.

"You know—Pushkin," I explained, in an embarrassed voice.

"Ah!" he smiled and said something to Zosia.

Victor took the opportunity to say that religion was opium and a means of repressing the working people, and that most of our people were finished with God and religion. There were some believers left here and there, of course, but they were unenlightened old people, remnants, moribund elements. Young people did not go in for that kind of nonsense, he said, and a girl like Zosia—he indicated her with his eyes—would be ashamed to wear a cross on a chain around her neck.

It did not seem to me he had said anything offensive, but when Stefan had translated his words something unexpected happened: hot flames leapt into Zosia's face, her cheeks crimsoned in a second, her eyes went dark, and her chestnut brows trembled, like a child's, in outrage.

I was afraid she would break down and cry, but instead she shot Victor an angry and scornful glance and with a quick energetic motion pulled the chain, with its Catholic crucifix, to the outside of her blouse. She threw back her head, chin up, and thrust her bosom forward in an open challenge.

Her face, bearing, and expression conveyed so much anger, pride and scorn that Victor was a little discomfited. He lowered his head like a bull about to charge and looked at me, and then at Karev, as if seeking support or calling us to witness, as if he wanted to shout, "Did you see that?"

Pani Julia said something to Zosia in a hurried, pleading voice, and Stefan murmured to her quietly but emphatically, obviously suggesting that she hide the cross away again. But Zosia, scarlet with indignation, stared straight ahead and sat without moving, except for the fluttering of her bosom.

A tense silence descended. Victor snorted menacingly. I knew him well, and understood that it was quite impossible for him to silently ignore such a demonstration.

"By the way," came Karev's voice, "we in the Soviet Union have freedom of religion. And the government respects the feelings of believers."

He spoke to no one in particular, but clearly and loudly, as if addressing a large audience. Victor studied him from under his brows, and seemingly understood that it would not do to stand on principle here, that it would be better to retreat. At last, mastering himself, he began to talk with Stefan about the crops.

No more than a minute later he was conversing happily with Stefan and *Pani* Julia, and even smiling. But Zosia was not so quickly placated. Karev tried in vain to distract her, to make her laugh, or even smile. She continued to sit

stern and silent, disregarding Victor, or at least not looking in his direction. Quite some time passed before she softened a little and began to smile. Even then, however, she did not put the cross back; it continued to hang outside her blouse.

In the meantime Victor had boiled the *pelmeni* in a rich meat broth. Now he served them himself, and demonstrated how they should be eaten, drenching them with the sauce of vinegar and mustard he had prepared according to a special recipe. He was a remarkably good chef, and Siberian *pelmeni* were his speciality. Thus it was not surprising that *Pani* Julia and her guests, after trying the dish, complimented Victor on his culinary abilities and quickly emptied two big plates. I liked his cooking too, and probably ate several *pelmeni* myself, but I am not certain of it—I was not capable of thinking about food at the time.

I kept peeking at Zosia, but not more often, I believe, than I looked at Stefan or *Pani* Julia. Only I looked at the older people without shyness, mainly out of necessity—for camouflage—while I looked at Zosia furtively, as if by chance, in a daze of tenderness and concealed delight.

Even when I was not looking at her I felt her presence every minute. I could not think about anything else, although I tried to follow the conversation, caught isolated phrases, and even smiled if someone beside me laughed.

Something unprecedented was happening to me. Never in my life had I been so disturbed by the sight of a girl or woman, although I had fallen in love several times already—the first time when I and my "beloved" were only five or six. My most recent heart-throb, a nurse named Olya from the next battalion, had been seriously wounded at the beginning of the campaign and was now in some hospital in the rear, not in the least suspecting how I felt.

In those days, the days of my youth, I often quoted poetry, rightly thinking that a great many ideas and longings had been expressed by poets incomparably better, more vividly and clearly, than I could put things myself. And now these lines kept running through my head:

Dear, let's sit here, side by side,
Gazing in each other's eyes!

Oh, if only I dared say that to Zosia, if only I could find a way to say it!

The conversation continued to be mainly between Victor and Stefan. It was about farming, and full of the details peasants love, and thus often incomprehensible to Karev and me—talk about soils and ploughing, about harvests, milk yield, and feed. They spoke calmly, unhurriedly, until Stefan

asked the question that had already been put to us in other villages: Would there be collective farms in Poland now too, and was it true that everyone in Poland would be sent off to Siberia?

As always in these cases Victor—his native village was somewhere near Omsk—became very angry and offended.

"You had better watch what you're saying, Stepa," he shouted. "Those words were put into your mouth! You think of Siberia as a place of exile and forced labour, don't you? Prison camps? Have you ever seen it? You did? Through the window of the train as you were passing through? I wouldn't trade my Mikhailovka for your whole district, for all of Europe!" His face was dark with ire. "Who put those words in your mouth? The Germans? Shame on you! I could strangle somebody for saying such things, you remember that!"

Stefan, who was noticeably tipsy, was stunned by this sudden turn in the conversation, which up to now had been peaceful and friendly. He put his hand to his heart and muttered "Przepraszam państwa," and excused himself as best he could. The others fell silent, and Zosia looked at Victor with unconcealed hostility. I was more than a little embarrassed myself, and could find nothing to say; once again it was Karev who saved the day.

"Let's drink to Mikhailovka," he proposed cheerfully, filling Stefan's glass, "and to Nowy Dwór."

I was rather drunk already, but still I could not get up the gumption to start a conversation with Zosia. I needed more courage. Surprising myself, I took the pitcher from Karev and filled my empty beer glass with *bimber*.

Victor, who was still ruffled from the talk about collective farms and Siberia, looked at me with amazement and obvious displeasure. He started to say something, but then just snorted and kept silent.

I had never drank that much before—and this was undiluted, home-distilled spirits. I should not have done it, of course. But I was goaded by a remark Stefan had made earlier: he said that the Germans were no match for us, that they drank in tiny glassfuls. Zosia's presence had something to do with it too, and I *had* to muster the courage to talk to her. Victor's displeasure seemed to me unjust: I wasn't really sick, was I?

At any rate, there could be no turning back now. With a nonchalant air—as if to say "What's so unusual about this?"—I raised my glass, smiled, and looked bravely at Stefan and *Pani* Julia. "May you live a hundred years, my

friends!" I remember that *Pani* Julia gazed at me sadly and thoughtfully, resting her cheek on her palm just as my grandmother used to do.

I had heard about *bimber*, but had still not expected it to be so strong—it actually seemed to blister my throat! I choked on my first swallow of the burning liquid, and tears flooded into my eyes; terrified that I would humiliate myself in front of everybody, I made a desperate effort and managed to drink all of it. It was only when I put the glass back down that I noticed everyone was looking at me. Zosia was watching me intently; her eyes seemed mocking. I had a coughing fit and turned red—probably not only in the face but in my back and buttocks too.

At once I felt hot and uncomfortable. I sat sheepishly, feeling the potent liquor going to my head, spreading all through my body. I could not see anything; I did not even notice the pickled cucumber and hunk of bread Stefan thrust towards me as he sing-songed in Polish:

My mlodzi, my mlodzi,
Nam bimber nie zaszkodzi,
Więc pijmy go szklankami,
*Kto z nami, kto z nami...**

Within a few minutes I realised that I had committed an irreparable mistake—what the devil had made me drink that foul stuff? I was rapidly sinking into drunkenness; all the things around me—the table, people's faces—were covered with a transparent veil, as if I were looking at them from under water.

I hauled out my phrase book again and began to page through it. Then I remembered it was useless and put it back into my pocket. My head buzzed, and I was feeling confused, but one thought did not leave me for an instant: I must get a conversation started with Zosia, I must at any cost!

I was still capable of realising that she would not understand me; I turned to Stefan and took him firmly by the hand, to get his attention.

"Please translate for me," I said urgently.

Then I banged my fist on the table, and addressed everybody in a loud voice: "Just one minute, please!" To make my words more impressive I stared into Stefan's face and squeezed his hand. I declaimed, no doubt far too loudly:

Dear, let's sit here, side by side.
Gazing in each other's eyes!
As you watch me, starry-eyed,
*I can feel love's tempest rise.***

* *We are young, we are young, Bimber doesn't hurt us, So we drink it by the glassful. Who will join us? Who will join us?*

** Translated by Dorian Rottenberg.

Stefan had not even opened his mouth—he was gaping at me, smiling in incomprehension—when Semyonov laughed deafeningly on my left. Someone else was laughing too.

"You milksop," I heard Victor's hiss in my ear. "You don't know how to drink. You're a disgrace to your uniform, and to the whole Soviet Union. Want me to help you outside?"

"No-o-oo!" I declared loudly and decidedly, swinging my head.

It seemed to me now that there was nothing I could not do. I looked at Zosia, but I could not see her clearly; her face doubled, swam, dissolved. I felt hot and ill; another minute later I felt I was going to be sick.

I got up, struggling to keep my balance. Swaying and stumbling against something, I moved towards the door. Karev caught up with me in the entry-way and led me out onto the porch. But I did not want his help; I got away from him and pushed him back.

"Let me show you the way."

"No-o-oo!" I shouted angrily. "I c'n manage."

And he went obediently away.

I stood on the porch, breathing in the fresh air with relief. I was out of sorts with everyone and everything. "The hell with it," I finally decided. I took a step forwards and went flying down the steps, hitting my face hard against something.

Then I was around back, by the hay barn, and Semyonov—it was he—was holding me by the arm and saying scornfully:

"You jackass, you've skinned your mug all up!"

He bent my head down and stuck his fingers into my throat. When I had vomited he wiped his hand on the top of his boot and admonished me:

"You ought to stick to soda water. But not more than one glass, or you'll wet your pants."

* * *

When I came to it was late evening; I was lying in the stuffy barn on a bunch of hay. The left half of the door was open. A silent, tender moon hung low over the orchard, directly in front of me; farther off dozens of stars, scattered around the sky, sparkled and flickered.

Beside me, almost touching me with their tails, three or four dogs were squealing quietly as they played and romped about. They did not pay the slightest attention to me. There

was a vile taste in my mouth, my head was splitting; my arms, neck, face—even my body under my tunic and trousers—were itching and burning hellishly: I had been bitten all over by fleas.

The late song of a solitary nightingale could be heard from far off; from somewhere near the house came the sound of Victor's guitar, of feet scuffling, merry voices, and laughter.

To tell the truth, Victor did not play very well. As a rule he confined himself to a rather ordinary and almost unchanging accompaniment. He explained this by pointing out that the guitar was a six-stringed, while he was used to a Russian instrument—with seven. And he sang without distinction of any special talent. But he was my friend and so his performance pleased me.

Right now he wasn't singing, but strumming something that resembled a waltz: they were dancing there beside the house. Zosia was probably dancing too; after all, why not? No doubt they were having a good time; and of course she was too. Well, let her, let her.

No regret I feel, no pain, no sorrow...

I told myself.

Blossom blows away, a song is sung...

I lay there, listening to the laughter, the shuffling of feet, and the voices. I suffered—and not only my soul: the relentless fleas scourged me with their fiery bites.

A bit later Karev came into the hay barn, limping a little, stepping uncertainly. He looked around with a lamp. Seeing me, he said:

"You're not asleep? Let's go out into the air. This place is crawling with fleas. Aren't they biting you?"

I had been bitten pitilessly all over, but I was still feeling sulky and stubborn.

"No," I said stubbornly. My head throbbed. "I'm not going anywhere."

Karev was usually taciturn, but when he had been drinking he liked to talk. He lifted his greatcoat from the hay, shook it, and continued.

"What a fine fellow our battalion commander is! He may be simple, but what a magnificent specimen! It's a great thing—the attraction of strength. You've noticed how everyone looks at him with delight, with love?"

"Everybody?"

"Word of honour—young and old alike. He's already kissed Stefan twice... He's a fine fellow, and a real rakehell," exclaimed Karev in delight. "No denying it. He drank more than a litre of *bimber*, not counting the other things, but

to look at him you'd think he'd never touched a drop, he's sober as a judge. I'm barely staying on my feet. And you know, he's right: the women go for the strong, determined ones. The ones with brazen self-confidence, who blaze their way through all obstacles. You and I are too intellectual to be successful... Useless chivalry." He sighed thoughtfully and disappointedly. "Damn it to hell. You see—with women you need combat tactics," he waved his fist, "drive bordering on brazenness..."

Of course I could have told him that my father came from a long line of working people, that my mother operated a loom, that I myself had gone to war from the school bench, and hadn't had time to become an intellectual, so that apparently the problem lay elsewhere. But I did not want to talk. I only brought out, pronouncing the words slowly and with difficulty:

"I don't make it my goal to be liked. Especially by women. I am not in the least concerned about that..."

4

I woke at dawn with a heavy head, bitter and ashamed about the preceding evening, about my drunkenness and my foolish, puerile behaviour. I got up feeling low and when, as I washed up by the truck, I looked into the mirror and saw purple bruises on my nose and cheek-bone, I felt utterly depressed. But I had no time for remorse—I set myself to work without even having breakfast.

By the time Victor got up I had already finished the reports on measures for camouflage, and for protection against air and chemical attack; I gave them to him to sign and sent them off to the brigade headquarters by motorcycle.

The three of us, Victor, Karev, and I, had breakfast beside the truck. They avoided the subject of the preceding day, and pretended not to notice my facial defects. Instead they discussed plans for working with the men on the regulations and tactics, and asked my opinion too.

After they had left I made up, with some difficulty, yet another urgent report, and then started in on the death notices.

I was faced with the task of filling out two hundred and three identical forms, writing on each the name and address of one of the dead man's relations, and also his rank, last name, first name, and patronymic, his year and place of birth, the date of his death, and the place he was buried.

Before me lay the model sent from headquarters; it was executed in a fine, calligraphic hand. I had all the necessary information too, and as I set to work it ran through my mind that this was a simple, mechanical job, incomparably easier than making up reports and documents that I had no idea about. How wrong I was!

I knew personally many of those who had been killed; some of them were my comrades; two of them—my friends. As I began to write I became completely immersed in memories; it was as if I travelled a second time over the eight hundred kilometres our battalion had covered in the month-long offensive, took part once again in the battles, witnessed scores of deaths all over again.

Once again before my eyes the machine-gunners of Lieutenant Abbasov's group drowned in the swift, cold water of the Niemen. Abbasov was a lively, light-hearted fellow from Baku; two hours later, when we had already gained a foothold on the opposite shore, he was crushed by a heavy German tank.

Once again I heard the scream of Kolya Bragin, my orderly—an affable village lad, the only provider for his paralysed mother,—as he lay bleeding to death on a mine field with his legs torn off.

Once again I saw Lieutenant Lomakin, a wise older man, formerly a mechanical engineer, who had been our battalion's Party organiser, as he ran panting through the wasteland on the outskirts of Mogilev, leading the rest of the men. He fell right at the edge of the field, cut down by a round of machine-gun fire.

And once again my favourite—our best soldier—Misha Sayenko from Vladivostok, was burned by a stream from a flamethrower and writhed in awful, inhuman pain which made him bite his lip right through.

And Savinov, a battery commander, a man old enough almost to be my grandfather, a mathematics teacher from somewhere near Smolensk, endowed with a great warmth of heart, lay at the bottom of a trench with his belly torn up by a mine splinter, calling quietly in a mindless, barely audible and ever weakening voice, "Mamma, Mamma, Mamma..."

And again... Once more... And still again...

All of these men, and dozens of others among the dead, were not strangers, but people I had known well and been close to. As I filled out the notices, I looked into the personnel files, examined their documents if any were left. At times I would learn something new about a dead man, perhaps something unexpected, and he would appear before

my eyes as clearly as if alive. Again I heard their voices and laughter, which had rung out so recently; once again I mourned their deaths.

So far they were lost only to us in the battalion. But almost every one of them had mothers and fathers, wives and children; they had relatives and, undoubtedly, friends. Somewhere in cities and in villages people were thinking about them, worrying about them, waiting for and rejoicing in every word from them. And tomorrow the field post would carry these notices off to every part of the country, bringing grief and weeping, desolation and deprivation into hundreds of families, making dozens of children orphans.

It was terrible to think how many hopes and expectations would be crushed in a single blow by these little grey sheets of paper with the same standard formula: "Faithful to his military duty died a hero's death in battle for our socialist Motherland..." It was terrifying even to imagine it—but what could I do?

At the very start of my work on the death notices I took a dislike to the official form of address, "Citizen..." The third or fourth form I made out was addressed to the Kostroma district, to the mother of my friend Seryozha Zashchipin, Evdokia Vassilievna, who worked as a medic in some village, a wonderful, warm-hearted woman. I knew her: she had visited us twice during our training, and treated us to a pre-war delicacy, home-baked honey cookies. She had invited me again and again to come and visit her after the war, in her village on the Volga. I felt that I should not, could not, address her merely as "Citizen". "Comrade...", "Dear..."? I sat trying to decide, remembered Yesenin for some reason and, after some hesitation, wrote "Dear Evdokia Vassilievna."

Time was passing, and there was no one I could ask advice from. At my own risk I started to write "Dear" together with the full name and patronymic on each of the notices.

On the line "place of burial" I had to write again and again "on the battlefield". These words, too, troubled me.

I remembered how, in the thaw of the first spring of the war, my mother, refusing to listen to anyone who tried to reason with her, set off on foot on a trip of almost two hundred kilometres to look for the grave of Alyosha, my elder brother, who was killed somewhere near Vyazma. Two weeks later she returned, without having found anything after all, she was worn out, ill. Her legs were completely ruined, and she had grown many years older all at once.

I did not doubt that many of those I was addressing "Dear", would want—if not at present, then after the war—to seek out the graves. But in the course of our advance we left the dead for the burial crews of the rifle divisions, and so did not know the precise place of burial, and despite every wish I could not indicate it.

After much thought the only other thing I hit upon was to write on every one of those two hundred and three notices, before the words "Your son (husband/father/brother...)" the following words, "It is with sincere regret that we inform you that..."

This also, of course, was a departure from the model; I decided that this small irregularity of mine softened the official dryness of the notices and was thus desirable, even necessary. If they refused to approve my work with a stamp at headquarters I would write them all over again—the battalion had about two thousand more blanks.

Around ten in the morning they came to check from the brigade: the head of the drill division, a taciturn and unsmilingly strict captain, rather advanced in years, and a jolly senior lieutenant from the political department, also not young. While still in the street, he pulled from the car a bundle of newspapers and pamphlets and shouted joyfully that our forces had taken the cities of Narva and Dęblin (Ivangorod) by storm.

Narva was somewhere way off to the north-east, near Leningrad, and Dęblin was somewhere south of Bialystok. Neither place was nearby. I had never been in either, and at that moment the cities taken in battle seemed to me—from my purely clerical, no doubt, point of view—to be nothing but many piles of death notices.

I rose and made my report, thinking with displeasure that now they would take up a good deal of my time; but, luckily, they left right away for the subdivisions.

I spent not less than six hours on the death notices. I could never have even imagined how broken and empty I would feel as the stack of completed notices grew before me. I wrote, filled with mournful thoughts and memories, and could only envy Victor and Karev: they did not know my sufferings, they were busy drilling the men. From where they were, beyond the village, I could hear the words of a brisk marching song.

The day, like the previous, was gloriously sunny, hot but not blazing, and there was such a marvellous smell of apples and honey. As before Zosia was busy in the morning with various light chores around the house and the garden. Several times *Pani* Julia stopped her—she tried to do as

much as possible herself. I had already noticed how carefully she guarded Zosia, how she spoiled her. This one daughter was all that she had now; her son and husband had died fighting the Germans back in 1939.

Hurrying through the garden that morning, Zosia tossed me a "Dzień dobry" without stopping; I mumbled an embarrassed "Good day" after her. I had seated myself so that a big, heavily-laden apple branch hung right over my forehead, hiding my bruised face somewhat.

During the day she walked or ran past me many times, humming some gay, playful melody to herself, carrying water in a little bucket—to the barrels in the garden, or with a hoe or some other thing in her hands.

I was immersed in the death notices, and did not look after her, as I had done the day before; I hardly lifted my eyes at all, and if I caught a glimpse of her it was only by chance, not intentionally. To fall prey to distraction, to pay attention to her rather than my task, seemed to me that morning almost a blasphemous disrespect to the memory of those who had perished. I am sure that if she had known what I was doing, what those greyish papers were about, she would not have sung so joyfully, would not have flitted back and forth like that.

About two that afternoon, when I had written out the last death notice, I sent a sentry to the fifth company, telling him to get his lunch there and bring me my meal from the battalion mess. When he was gone I was about to begin work on a report, but then decided to allow myself a short break and got out my book from my map case.

I looked around me: there was no one in the orchard or the yard. I began to read, and immediately was swept up. Getting up from the table, I declaimed with pleasure the poems I liked best, mostly from memory, hardly looking at the text.

I almost lost track of myself, but I stood facing the house, so that I would notice the returning soldier in time. I was glad to see the sentry had not yet come back; there was no one to interfere.

Let the dark-blue twilight sometimes whisper,
You were nothing but a song and dream;
The designer of your waist and shoulders
Must have known a secret most supreme.
*Not to roam, to break through crimson bushes...**

I heard a rustling and turned around rapidly. Zosia was standing just ten paces from me.

I don't know what she could have felt without knowing the language, but her face was concentrated, full of deep

* Translated by Dorian Rottenberg.

feeling; her eyes, opened wide, looked at me searchingly. Perhaps she was caught up by the poignant melody, the music of Yesenin's verses. Or maybe she was straining to guess what they were about—I cannot say.

I broke off abruptly, blushed scarlet, and, remembering about my face, turned away hastily. But I clearly heard her say in a quiet voice, "More." The word sounds the same in Russian and Polish.

I was at a loss. Luckily the soldier appeared at that minute with two steaming mess tins. From behind my branch I could see Zosia take a small sickle, which gleamed in the sun, from a branch, and go off between the apple trees, walking haughtily, as if she were angry about something. When she had disappeared into the back of the orchard I began to eat, the open volume before me. In another fifteen minutes or so I was making out yet another report.

Victor and Karev soon returned. They were very cheerful—the inspectors had been satisfied with our battalion. As the political department man confessed to Victor, they had expected worse: the brigade commander had ordered them to look in on us almost every other day, to check and help.

At my request Victor, sitting at the edge of the table, put his signature to all the death notices; it took him something like half an hour. As he did this he neither sighed, nor paused to reflect, nor said a single word. Yet I could say that he was suffering in his own way. He bent his head and knit his brows, breathing loud through his nose. I knew he was seeing the names of people he had known well: he winced, as if from a sour taste or in pain, and scratched fiercely at his scalp.

When he had finished, he rose, without breaking his silence, and washed up beside the truck. When he was drying off he called me to lunch, which *Pani* Julia had prepared for us. I did not want to go. Thanking him, I pointed to the empty mess tins under the apple tree. He did not insist and went off towards the house with Karev.

5

After lunch Victor, who had heard there was a pile of firewood in the forest which had been prepared while the Germans were still there, decided to bring some in for *Pani* Julia and Stefan, a truckload each.

This was like him.

"We are more than just soldiers; we are liberators," he

told the men over and over, proudly. "Who are we liberating? Those who have nothing. We must, in any way we can, help them. We are not to take, but to give."

He was convinced of this, and wherever we were stationed he willingly helped the inhabitants in his free moments: prepared firewood for them, worked in their gardens, made shelters for those whose homes had been burnt down, or even managed to put together stoves from old, broken bricks. I have no doubt that in later days these people often remembered him with kind words.

He also loved to fill the truck with children and let them ride to their hearts' content—the shouts, the squeals, the joy! He considered this a matter of almost the highest importance, although our former battalion commander, killed two weeks earlier, did not approve of what he called this "expenditure of gasoline not occasioned by necessity", and had repeatedly said so to Victor.

At Victor's orders Semyonov brought the Studebaker around from the mortar battery. I saw and heard Victor, standing in the yard beside the truck, asking Stefan about the road. The old man tried to talk him out of going: he said the woods thereabouts were literally teeming with Germans trying to break out of encirclement and get back across the front. Three days earlier they had butchered a Polish family at a nearby farm, and the day before, in the very forest where Victor intended to go, they had ambushed our ambulance bus from a thicket, killing the driver and the medic, and burned it together with the wounded it was carrying.

Pani Julia, too, begged Victor not to go. Zosia, hurrying up behind her, threatened him with her little fist and said something quickly and angrily to her mother and Stefan—I understood she was demanding that they forbid Victor to go.

But all these pleas only egged Victor on. Laughing condescendingly, he ordered Semyonov to bring two submachine-guns, reserve ammunition, and six grenades. He glanced over the weapons to check them, took the wheel—Semyonov sat beside him—and rode out of the yard. At the very last moment Stefan, who was seriously angered by his stubbornness, and cursed heartily in Polish and in Russian—mentioning the plague, the devil, and Victor's parents—hopped into the back of the Studebaker.

I sat under the apple tree and wrote, but in my thoughts I was in the forest with Victor. I very much wanted to go with him, and wished they really would ambush us: then I could have showed my worth. I day-dreamed of our return

to the village, myself seriously and dangerously wounded, the truckbed filled with a load of dead Germans, killed by me. Zosia and *Pani* Julia run to meet us; Stefan and Victor vying with one another tell how, if it were not for me, not one of us would have got away alive.

It was absurd, to dream of such a thing. And why should we bring enemy corpses out of the forest? But I remember that I really did wish it, vehemently. So that Zosia—and not only she—could see that I was not just a pen-pusher, not some milksop with a scratched nose who slaved away at papers and read poetry, but a man and a soldier. She had seen the medals on my tunic, of course, but they got medals in headquarters too—sometimes they were even given to pen-pushers—and so I wanted very much to demonstrate my valour in deeds.

I became so lost in dreams that I spoiled my report on the battalion's engineering equipment and had to do it over.

Victor, Semyonov, and Stefan came back an hour and a half later, very pleased with themselves. And the truck was loaded high with excellent birch firewood. *Pani* Julia began to smile, but Zosia continued to be out of sorts. As Stefan explained to Victor, she did not want wood that might have caused someone's death, and declared that she and her mother could get along without it. So temperamentally did she protest and express her indignation that *Pani* Julia quickly gave in and asked Victor to take the wood to Stefan's yard.

For once Victor did not even try to insist. The Studebaker turned round at once and drove away. *Pani* Julia and Zosia went off somewhere on business of their own. I was left with those cursed papers. Despite all my efforts they did not seem to have diminished; I wanted so much to get through them at last, and with a clear conscience write a letter to my mother.

I worked without looking up, while Victor brought a second load of wood. Making use of the absence of Zosia and *Pani* Julia, Semyonov, Stefan and he hurriedly threw down the load. In two minutes they had it stacked beside the barn.

I remembered it was time to change the sentry in the orchard and as soon as Semyonov was free I put him at the post. Meanwhile Stefan had been called away—relatives had come to visit. Before he left he thanked Victor again and invited him to come and drink a bottle of *bimber* with him and his brother-in-law. Victor promised to come a little later.

Before returning the Studebaker he sat on the running-

board smoking for a while, staring meditatively at the neat woodpile. Then an old woman in poor clothing, pitiful and dirty, came up and addressed him in a plaintive voice.

She kept repeating the words "nic niema"* and pointing to the woodpile, and then across the street at a broken-down little house. Apparently she lived there.

"Tomorrow, tomorrow," said Victor, understanding at once, "I promise."

I had no doubt that he would bring wood for her the next day, but she did not understand, and kept crying, beating her bony hand on her breast and stubbornly repeating "nic niema".

"Damned old woman, I hope you split in two," he said angrily, but got up: he couldn't stand tears. He made a savage face, and looked towards me as if seeking sympathy. "There is no shaking her off."

After a last drag he put out the cigarette with his heel and grabbed the door of the cab.

I sensed that he had decided to go right now, alone. The sun was setting already, and it was surely getting dark in the forest; the danger of attack was much greater now. Hurriedly collecting my papers, I locked them in a metal box, grabbed my submachine-gun out of the Dodge, and hurried into the yard.

"Where are you going?" asked Victor in surprise, leaning out of the cab. "For firewood? You go ahead and finish with the papers," he ordered. "I won't be a minute."

He put the truck in gear and tore out of the yard. I stood a little while looking after him, thinking again that I should have shown determination, should not let him go alone. Then I went back into the orchard.

I was now physically unable to write any more. My hand had gone numb; no matter how I strained my eyes I had trouble making out the letters and lines in the half-light under the apple tree; my head was splitting, and I could not understand anything. And then my eye fell on Semyonov. Evidently unhappy that I had assigned him to sentry duty for the whole evening, and confident of my soft-heartedness and his own impunity, he had gathered apples in the hem of his tunic and, sprawled on the seat of the Dodge, was champing away demonstratively and looking at me challengingly.

I walked out of the village. At once thoughts of Zosia took hold of me, and try as I might I could not get rid of them.

Really, what did I want with this Zosia?

* I have nothing.

And when you came to it, who was she and what was so special about her? Just a perfectly ordinary girl. There would be any number of them in my life—if, of course, I went on living. And no doubt some of them would be better, prettier.

And what could I—a Komsomol member, and a convicted atheist, have in common with some Catholic girl? What? To call a spade a spade, she was a religious fanatic, after all. And no doubt a rabid nationalist.

A prince am I. It is a shame for me
*To bow before a haughty Polish woman...**[4]

All very correct and logical; but alas, only in theory. In vain I struggled to think about something else, to find something ugly in her, to convince myself of the devil only knows what sort of things about her.

I walked and walked through the fields, not thinking where or why, and only came to myself at the edge of a big forest, which loomed darkly in the gathering dusk. I stopped and looked around, trying to think where I might be.

Finally I noticed the fresh, ribbed tracks of the Studebaker in the sandy road.

This was evidently the same forest to which Victor had gone for firewood. Now I understood. I had heard Stefan answering Victor's questions about how to get to where the firewood lay ready. I had remembered his words, and now, concerned about Victor, had gone by the same road without even thinking.

There was a strong smell of pine in the forest; it was dark, stuffy, and gloomy. I had probably not gone in farther than five hundred metres when I saw something very big and black; I did not realise at once that it was the ambulance bus the Germans had burned.

I went up to it, I did not look inside—in the past year and a half I had seen more than enough corpses. I squatted down on my heels and, with some difficulty, made out the tracks of the Studebaker. Then I went on.

I do not remember precisely whether I felt fear in that sinister, hostile forest; but I could not help but be concerned. If anything happened to Victor I would never have been able to forgive myself for having let him go alone.

I was in the depths of the forest when at last I heard somewhere in front of me the noise of a motor; when I was sure it was coming my way I slipped into hiding behind the trees.

Two minutes later the Studebaker passed me, loaded with firewood, its darkened headlamps gleaming faintly. Victor sat at the wheel peering into the semi-darkness.

* Translated by Dorian Rottenberg.

It did not occur to me to call to him. It was only that I wanted, and considered it my duty, to be at his side if anything happened. But I had no doubt that if he were to see me now, if he found out or guessed that what had brought me here was concern for his safety, he would have laughed, and probably said good-naturedly, but without hiding his scorn, something like: "Poppycock, and also rotten sentimentalism."

He would probably have given me a good dressing-down too: I was completely unarmed—after all, when I left I had no idea I would end up in the forest. I had not even taken my pistol.

He went past me, towards the village, and a little later I came out onto the road and followed slowly, past the burned bus, to the edge of the woods.

I remember I did not even feel especially glad when the trees at last ended and the fields of rye suddenly surrounded me. What good did this evening hold in store for me? What awaited me in the village?

The rye rustled mournfully as if in sympathy; and the crickets kept up an unbroken, weary monotone.

I came to the edge of the village. It was now completely dark, and the first stars were beginning to shine bright. The moon had lost its initial yellowness and turned silver.

In its ghostly light a crucified Christ suffered on a high wooden cross; I must confess that I was suffering too—I was sad and lonely.

As I approached the house I heard a guitar—Victor playing. Of course he had already unloaded the wood, returned the Studebaker, changed clothes, had supper, and was now relaxing. Being a man of action, he had quickly and decisively done a necessary job. I had spent the same time pining and suffering, like some wilting flower, uselessly.

They had apparently gathered beside *Pani* Julia's house as they had the day before, to dance and make merry. Well, let them... I would not join them. Let Zosia—and not only her—think that all that did not interest me in the least, that I had better things to occupy me than their silly dancing, emotions, and courtships.

Victor, accompanying himself on the guitar, sang with feeling:

Turning over these faded old photos,
A belated tear I will shed
On a snowy-pinafored schoolgirl
With her hair in a heavy braid.

As I recollect this it seems absurd and unrealistic that

Victor, who was a courageous, strong, stout-hearted fellow, and could not stand any kind of sentimentality, could, when in the mood, sing that sort of tender nonsense. Absurd and unrealistic, but there it is—that's the way it was.

Maybe now you're already a lady
And a schoolboy with tousled hair—
Goodness gracious!—calls you his Mummy,
*You my schoolgirl with braid so fair.**[5]

Well, let them, I stood gloomily beside the cross; I did not want to go into the village, to socialise or talk with anybody. I didn't know what I should do now. Where could I go, what could I do until bedtime?

From the nearby houses came the smell of living and the appetising aroma of freshly-baked bread. I felt rather hungry, and thought with a pang that probably no one was wondering whether I had gotten any supper.

After standing a while longer, I went quietly through the back alleyways to where the battalion kitchen stood, beside Stefan's porch.

From behind the windows, which had been hung with blackout, Russian—and more seldom Polish—phrases could be heard. But there was no one in the yard beside the two-wheeled trailers with the field kettles. Reluctant to call the cook—I could hear his voice coming from the house—I lifted the lid of one of the kettles and discovered dark, warm tea. In the other were the remains of a stew, which smelled wonderfully of meat and smoke.

I looked around but could not find a dipper, or a spoon, or a mess-tin. I took a small spade, washed it with water from a barrel, and carefully, so as not to soil my clothes, bent over the kettle and dipped out an enormous serving of the thick buckwheat porridge.

It was not quite cold, and amazingly good: plentifully spiced with captured lard, tinned pork, and fried onions. I sat down on a log beside the trailer. Using a wood chip for a spoon, I began to eat with appetite and great enjoyment. Only now did I realise how hungry I was.

They were drinking inside, and fairly far gone. Besides the cook—Zyuzin, a stolid elderly lance-corporal, whom everyone in the battalion called by his patronymic—Fomich —I recognised the voices of Stefan and Sidyakin, a stubborn young machine-gunner from the fifth company. There was someone else too—Stefan's brother-in-law, who spoke little, and only in Polish.

Stefan kept asking about the collective farms, and Fomich, with tipsy assurance, drawling his words, answered,

"It's all ri-ight—a man can li-ive."

*Translated by Dorian Rottenberg.

But Sidyakin, citing his own village as an example, blasted the collective farms vigorously and advised Stefan to take a wage job in the city if collectivisation were to begin. He said it would be no good, no matter what.

"Don't worry," reassured Fomich in a singsong, contradicting Sidyakin imperturbably. "You'll do all ri-ight."

Their conversation interested me, and I would probably have sat a while longer listening, but it felt as if I were eavesdropping. And so, when I had eaten all the porridge I had scooped up in the spade, I drank some water, and went out through the back yards unnoticed by anyone.

Meanwhile Victor's singing had given way to music from an accordion. Zelenko, the battalion favourite, was playing. He had rare talent, and real virtuosity. Whatever he performed—a Ukrainian folksong or an old-time waltz, a jaunty dance or march tune—you could only be amazed at how his battered old instrument with its three rows of buttons, its punctured and patched bellows, could produce such pure, melodic, and heart-rending sounds.

The tasty, filling porridge had fortified me physically, and morally too. I felt more alert, and rather more self-assured. Zelenko played, and I was inexorably drawn to the sound. Quietly and slowly I moved through the back ways towards *Pani* Julia's house, where they were dancing to the music of the accordion.

A little later I was standing in a nettle patch behind the barn, listening to the laughter and the voices. The accordion was calling me—calling, encouraging and exciting me—and gradually I inclined to the idea that I should go and ask Zosia to dance.

And really, why shouldn't I do it? Wasn't I as good as they were?

I tried to see myself as others did, to judge myself sternly, but objectively.

I wasn't puny; I was agile enough, and could dance at least as well as Victor and Karev. Of course the bruises on my face were no ornament, but after all it was not so important: I could rise above them.

Maybe I didn't have a head for drink, and lacked command characteristics; I was not forceful enough in addressing subordinates—but I was not a dishrag or a shirker—I had been in combat for more than a year and a half, had been wounded and decorated, and was a better shot than the others. And, if official reports and the front-line newspaper were to be believed, I had more dead Germans to my credit than anyone else in the battalion.

"Cities are captured by courage," I told myself as I walked

up and down behind the barn. "Damn being chivalrous! I'll never get anywhere by hanging back. The main thing is to use assault tactics. Insistence bordering on brazenness."

And I repeated over again in my mind Victor's favourite maxim: Life is like a bull: you should take it by the horns, not grab its tail.

Soon I had talked myself into throwing aside all hesitation. I could already clearly picture how I would go up to Zosia and—no matter who she was standing with—ask her to dance. I would invite her not with a polite inclination of the head, but like a real man—imperatively, strongly, taking her rather roughly by the hand. I thought that if someone were at her side—in my way—I would push him aside with my shoulder, as if by accident, in passing, as I had seen Victor push an artillery lieutenant at a dance in a village outside Mogilev.

Overflowing with unusual determination, I paced up and down restlessly. Now nothing and nobody could stop me—I would blaze right through, just like that!

With my whole torso I swept aside an imaginary rival and grasped Zosia's hand in my imagination with such force, that it even occurred to me that I was in danger of overdoing it. She was young and tender, after all, and if I were to grab her that way, she might cry out from pain or get offended and angry, like yesterday at lunch, when Victor, without laying a hand on her, had just indicated her cross on its chain with a glance.

I finally got myself so worked up that I simply could not remain inactive any longer.

It would not have been appropriate to appear from the back way. And it wouldn't hurt to brush the dust off my boots first, either. I went over to the truck.

The sentry—Semyonov—was half-lying on the hay in the truck, lazily humming to himself. When I approached he squinted at me, but did not even get up.

"Get up!" I ordered not loudly, but firmly. Seeing that he did not stir, I grabbed him by the shoulder and shouted in a voice of iron, "Get up!"

He gaped at me and stood up in the truckbed. (If he had tarried two or three seconds longer I would surely have thrown him out of the truck.) He was about to say something, but I cut him off fiercely without letting him open his mouth:

"Silence. Are you on sentry duty or at your mother-in-law's for pancakes? You've become completely shameless. If I see this sort of thing again I'll have you cleaning pota-

toes in the mess for a month!" I shot my hand to my cap. "Carry on!"

I had never spoken to him that way before, and understandably he was a little stunned by my vehemence. He climbed out of the truck obediently, hung his submachine-gun across his chest, and went off into the apple trees rubbing his shoulder and mumbling discontentedly.

In fact, I had no intention of calling him to account; I simply needed to get a cloth from Victor's sack, on which it seemed to me he was lying.

Not paying him any more attention, I removed the dust from my boots. I gave them a generous coating with wartime shoepolish—black, stinking stuff—and vigorously rubbed them to high gloss with the rag as I had seen Victor do.

I pulled my belt in another two notches, tugged at my tunic carefully, straightened my epaulets and cap, and squeezed through a gap in the fence out into the street.

I intended to enter the yard with a certain brazy carelessness. But first, in order to get a quick idea of the situation, I stood unnoticed at the gate, hidden behind a tree.

On the little square in front of the porch about twenty people were dancing in pairs by the radiant light of the moon. Most of them were soldiers and sergeants from the battalion; some of them were dancing as "ladies". There were only three or four women, and I caught sight of Zosia right away.

She was dancing with Victor, her hand resting trustfully on his shoulder. He was holding her, saying something to her as they waltzed. I don't know if she understood a word of it, but she was smiling, even laughing. I looked more closely, and saw with amazement, and a sinking feeling, the unfeignedly delighted expression on her face, which showed pale in the silvery moonlight.

There could be no doubt that she was feeling happy. She was having a good time without me!

I went back behind the house and lay down in the hay in the Dodge, trying to get a grip on myself somehow, to calm and collect my thoughts.

I was depressed, inexpressibly depressed, and my head ached.

No regret I feel, no pain, no sorrow...

No, it wasn't true. Not like that, not like that at all.

Horossan has one such door, they tell me,
On the threshold roses line the floor,
And a pensive peri there is dwelling.
Horossan has one such door, they tell me,
*But it did not yield to one, that door.**

* Translated by Peter Tempest.

"I couldn't do it!" I thought to myself. I lay on my back, my eyes wide open. Countless stars twinkled brightly in the dark, deep sky. They winked playfully, as if teasing me. Only the stars and the moon know how many lovers there are in the world, and how many among them are unhappy. The moon, of course, has more tact and kindness. But the stars...

But maybe they weren't teasing at all? Maybe they were cheering me on: "Don't be shy. Cities are taken by bravery. Go on! Dare!" Perhaps. I don't know. But Zosia's face had told me more than any hopes, encouragements, or reasoning. It was easier to read and incomparably more convincing than any other argument.

I could not sleep for a long time. Semyonov, with his submachine-gun at the ready, walked steadily back and forth, as a sentry should, through the orchard. Deep down I even regretted that I had been so sharp with him. Maybe now I should say something good to him, something approving. But I could not bring myself to begin. I felt ashamed: he had seen my energetic preparations, and my speedy return.

I lay there, feeling deeply unhappy and cheated. On the other side of the house they danced to the rollicking tunes of the accordion. Now and then there was laughter, or a merry exclamation. It even seemed to me that I could make out Zosia's voice among them, sonorous and joyful.

She was having a good enough time without me. I was horrified, tormented by the thought that she was not even thinking of me, did not even remember me; that in a few weeks we would move off, and she would stay behind, live the life that no doubt someone else would make for her; and I—whether I was killed or survived—would in any case disappear forever from her memory, like dozens of other strangers, people to whom she was indifferent.

I thought about the injustice, the cruelty of fate. And the more I thought the more the feeling of hurt and self-pity overpowered me.

* * *

I was awakened after midnight by a loud conversation. Victor and Semyonov stood beside the truck, in the moonlight. Victor, to my amazement, was drunk.

"Comrade Senior Lieutenant, I will bring a blanket from the house," said Semyonov uncertainly, holding him by the arm, "and a pillow."

"Forget that... I don't want a nursemaid. You talk. too much, Semyonov. You don't understand elementary truths," mumbled Victor angrily, getting into the truck with the help of the orderly. "Idleness ruins armies. And no drinking, no women..."

6

The next evening we left Nowy Dwór.

Just before supper we got a completely unexpected order: by morning we were to be east of Brest, in the area of Kobrin station, where, it seems, reinforcements and equipment for our brigade were being unloaded.

At almost the same moment the order arrived, the brigade commander came round to us in an armoured car.

"Five days for orientation, for working out smooth coordination in action. Then—into battle," he announced in a buoyant voice. "They're waiting for us on the Vistula," he hugged me—around the shoulder, and Victor too—with his artificial arm. He said it proudly and significantly, as if without our little unit it would be impossible to force the Vistula or to continue the war at all. "The good things are best taken in little doses, boys. We've had a little rest—now we should be thinking of our work..."

Yes, he was right. The offensive continued, the front needed reinforcements. Somewhere up above, probably in *Stavka* they had changed their minds; the month and a half or two of rest had been converted into a mere three days. Quite correct, but it came on unexpectedly. I hadn't even had time to write to my mother. And what sort of a rest was it, really? I had worked almost without looking up from dawn to dusk.

We got ourselves ready in half an hour.

Victor, a map spread on his lap, sat in the head Dodge beside the driver, sullen and silent. He had been gloomy all day, droning his most militant melodies. That morning he had drilled the men for several hours. He was fussy, demanding, and threatening.

At lunch I learned from Karev that the previous evening, when Victor had tried to give Zosia a "real" hug after the dances, she had broken away from him abruptly and smashed his guitar over his head — that fine concert guitar, the handiwork of the famous Viennese master Leopold Schenk himself.

"She gave him quite a clout," Karev told me, not without relish, "smashed it right to smithereens."

From shame or disappointment, discouragement and hurt pride Victor had got drunk around midnight.

This was news to me, of course, but I was not especially surprised when I heard that she had struck him. The girl had character, a sort of wild pride and independence, I had felt it the very first day.

The peasants saw us off. *Pani* Julia, Stefan, and someone else came up to our truck. The other trucks also were surrounded by well-wishers, or people who were simply curious. But Zosia was nowhere to be seen.

Pani Julia brought a big bouquet of flowers and a jug of sour cream. Victor took the bouquet and muttered something, then tossed it into the truck and once again buried himself in the map; he had not even smiled as he took the flowers. Stefan dragged up two heavy baskets and, with a salty soldier's comment, dumped apples and choice cucumbers out onto the hay in the back of the truck. He turned to Victor and said something, but receiving no answer fell silent. He took out a neatly folded newspaper, tore off an even square, and began to roll himself a smoke.

A few latecomers hurried up and clambered into the trucks. I was seeing to the loading, instructing the sergeants and drivers. I was worried that I might let something slip and repeated the orders necessary for military security during the march over and over.

Before dawn, in something like seven hours, we had to travel nearly two hundred kilometres along back roads with headlights darkened, finding our way mainly by the stars. Brigade headquarters had warned us that the woods were full of German stragglers making their way west in isolated groups; anywhere along our route we might be shot at, ambushed in the dark. But to camouflage our movement the brigade was to move only by night, and in battalions—three truck caravans travelling separate roads.

With a gloomy, concentrated face Victor examined the map. *Pani* Julia stood nearby, sighing every now and then. Victor had been kind to her, but her eyes held more than gratitude—they showed sorrow, compassion, even love. It was as if she were parting forever with a person very near and dear to her.

Victor had entrusted the loading entirely to me. He did not interfere, or even say a single word. Now the time set down in the orders for departure had come, but I put off giving the order. I wanted terribly to see Zosia once again, even if only for a moment. But she had gone off with her basket an hour and a half before, and apparently had still not returned.

In order to delay our departure a little longer I began to inspect the machine-gun mounted on a tripod in the Dodge, a worried look on my face. I busied myself with it for several minutes, but still Zosia did not appear. Then, despising and cursing myself for my weakness and inability to master my feelings, I went once more around the little column of eight trucks, giving some last-minute instructions to the commanders and drivers. When I came back round to the Dodge I looked furtively at my watch: it was impossible to delay any longer.

Standing by the side of the road I looked at *Pani* Julia's house for the last time, with bitterness and sorrow; having made up my mind at last, I commanded loudly:

"Prepare to move out!"

Then I jumped lightly into the low-slung Dodge and straightened up, listening to the command being passed back to the end of the column. At that same instant I caught sight of Zosia.

She was running towards us from the house as fast as her legs would carry her, shouting something. I thought for a second that she was embarrassed for the way she had behaved toward Victor the evening before, and that in order to smooth over her excessive sharpness she had decided to say goodbye to him, to wish him a "hundred years", as *Pani* Julia, Stefan, and the other villagers had.

She reached us at last, out of breath, but did not rush towards Victor, as I had expected. Instead she shoved an old envelope into my hands, and said something hurriedly, holding up three fingers.

"Don't look inside for three days," said Stefan, smiling rather slyly.

I blushed, and thanked her mechanically, little knowing what I said. Then I sat down on the bench along the side. I do not think Victor even looked round.

The engine was revving loudly, but the truck had not begun to move. Zosia's face was tense and frightened—there were tears in her eyes. Suddenly she snatched my head in her hands and kissed me forcefully on the lips.

I came to my senses only when we had left behind the outskirts of the village. Up to then I had never been kissed by a woman—except of course my mother and grandmother.

My first thought, my first desire, was to return. Even if only for a moment. But how in the world could I?

We travelled fast in the gathering dusk. We had not yet turned on our narrow slits of headlights, and the semi-

darkness got thicker and thicker. The outlines of the road, of the individual bushes and trees dissolved and vanished. The tall, dense forest stretched out on both sides of the road in a black, silent mass. In places it came right up to the edge of the road.

I sat on a box alongside the machine-gun, looking alertly ahead and to the sides, my palms holding its rough handles mechanically. I was ready at any moment to make an accustomed, almost simultaneous movement with my two thumbs: the left would lift the safety, the right would press the trigger and release a deadly rain of bullets on any possible adversary.

I had forbidden smoking and loud talking along the way. And anyway the sudden change had stunned the men somewhat; not a voice, not an unnecessary sound could be heard from the trucks behind us.

Motors growled evenly and quietly in the evening stillness of the forest; tires swished. The only other sound was the young radio operator in our Dodge (the one with the bandaged head; he had refused to go off to the hospital) trying to establish contact with brigade headquarters. As he had four days back, he kept repeating doggedly: "Smolensk! Smolensk! This is Penza! This is Penza! Why don't you answer? Over..."

We were moving towards the unknown, towards new battles, in which many of us would die. Once again I would command at least a hundred grown-up and experienced men. I would kill, I would have to "show exemplary courage and personal heroism" at every step. And I was a rag, a snot, a milksop! I had not even been able... Had not even dared... I was incapable of so much as giving a girl a hint about my feelings! Oh, how I cursed myself!

Victor sat motionless, erect and stern, beside the driver and peered ahead into the twilight two hundred yards ahead, where the brigade commander's armoured utility vehicle, which he had given us for cover, was moving along steadily. He was humming a marching song to himself. A little later he turned around sharply, brushing the antenna with his elbow, and grabbed the bouquet *Pani* Julia had given him. Evidently he had just remembered about it.

"Like for a funeral," he said angrily, and flung the flowers into the ditch beside the road. "Namby-pamby sentimentalism!"

And once again the motors growled steadily in the tense silence, and the radio operator repeated his stubborn incantation, calling brigade headquarters.

"What's in that envelope?" Karev kept whispering. "Let's have a look."

"What do you mean, 'have a look'? You heard what she said: three days!"

But I could not wait. That evening, at our first rest stop, I went off quietly to one side. Concealing the beam of my flashlight under my rain-cloak I opened the envelope—it had been sealed with breadcrumbs. Inside, folded in a piece of paper was a photograph of Zosia, no doubt taken before the war—a pretty adolescent girl with dimpled cheeks, short braids sticking out, and a tender, naively trusting expression on her childish face.

On the other side, scrawled in a hasty, uneven hand, were the words: "Ja cię kocham, a ty śpisz!"*

7

Cities are taken by bravery, that much is true. My friend Victor—Victor Stepanovich Baikov, Hero of the Soviet Union—was the first member of our army to force his way into the streets of Berlin. And there he remained forever, under a stone marker in the Treptow Park. But as to how women are won over... Even today, at twice the age, I find it hard to say; it seems to be something complicated, something that there is no universal recipe for.

I was no more than a boy then, full of dreams, and there was so much I did not understand—that was so long ago! But even now I feel a pang whenever I remember the little Polish village of Nowy Dwór, and Zosia, and my very first kiss.

I can see her as if she stood before my eyes: not tall, but well proportioned and remarkably captivating; swinging her little basket on her arm, stepping lightly and nimbly on her dainty feet—as if she were dancing—she passes through the orchard, humming some happy melody ... her face blazing, she sits indignant at the table, head high, her bosom, with the tiny silver crucifix hanging on her flowered blouse, thrust out in defiance. It all comes back to me so clearly; I remember even her freckles, even the minute dot of a birth-mark on the lobe of her tiny ear. She is full of child-like gaiety and mirth; then stern, and proud, almost haughty; then overflowing with exquisite tenderness, coquetry, and awakening womanhood. I see her too at the moment we parted: the tense, frightened face, the eyebrows trembling like a child's, the tears in the corners of her eyes.

I have thought of her so many times in the years since

* I love you, but you're asleep!

then, and other girls have paled by comparison. She is probably different now, but I cannot—and do not want to—picture her as changed, older. Even now the feeling haunts me that I really did sleep through something very important that I missed, something huge and unique.

1963

KONSTANTIN SIMONOV

High in the Tatra Mountains

During the war, Konstantin Simonov published a number of stories written immediately in the wake of events. The story *High in the Tatra Mountains* about the wartime cooperation of Slovaks, Poles and Soviet soldiers was first published in December 1945, in *Pravda*.

Doctor Bernard's Story

This winter I found myself on the Polish-Slovak border, in a district into which, following the Slovak uprising, there came partisan units and groups who crossed the front-line. I wanted to write a book about the uprising, and each new arrival from the other side of the front-line was of enormous interest to me. In my conversations with partisans, Russian and Slovak, references were made more than once to a certain Doctor Bernard, who could tell me something far more interesting than anything they had to say.

"And what is it he could tell me?" I would ask.

"For two months, in a cabin up in the mountains, he saved our wounded. Anyway, if you manage to meet him, he'll tell you..."

At last I had the opportunity to meet the doctor himself.

It was a frosty day. We were sitting at a freshly-planed wooden table in a Slovak cottage: Doctor Yuri Bernard, two Slovak girls and myself. The two girls were sisters, both pale, thin, with large eyes set in emaciated faces, as if they had still not had time to come over all they had lived through.

Yuri Bernard looked about thirty, perhaps less. He was rather tall, thin, even a little narrow-shouldered, with a cap of dark chestnut, almost black hair and a thin, energetic face with a shy, slightly ironic smile. We sat together at the table for five or six hours while he related his story from beginning to end.

I took down everything he said word for word, and what you are about to read is simply a reproduction of Doctor Bernard's story, which I heard in February 1945, on the border between Poland and Slovakia, in the village of Krempakhy.

I was born in 1916 in the village, or rather the small town of Chop, in the Transcarpathian Ukraine, on the border with Hungary. I studied in the high school in Uzhgorod, and then at a medical institute: first I graduated from the pharmaceutical department because I wanted to become a chemist like my father, but then entered the medical faculty.

When the German occupation began, the Germans took my father, mother, sister and fiancée to a concentration camp. There they perished.

My brother, who was also a doctor, and I were arrested and sent to a concentration camp in Jelšava. We spent quite a long time there, but in early 1944 we both managed to escape and reach a small place called Revucy in Slovakia. There we got hold of false documents in which our surname was changed slightly: we became Ivan and Yuri Bernat, Slovak by nationality.

Not long afterwards we established contact with the partisans and joined them in the mountains: they were in great need of doctors. To begin with we were with a unit under the command of Vassili, a former Russian POW. Then we joined the partisan unit under Bělič, with which we stayed during the whole of the uprising and at the end of October we set off with the wounded being transported to the district of Tři duby, where the wounded were taken to the aerodrome to be flown out.

Having dispatched the wounded, we returned into the mountains to look for our unit, but it was no longer where we had left it. That was 28 October 1944.

On Mount Proševá, having despaired of finding our unit, we met Pyotr Velichko, commander of the Stefaník partisan brigade. He asked us who we were, and we told him that we were partisans from Bělič's unit. Then Velichko said:

"Bělič left a long while ago. What are you able to do?"

We replied that we were doctors.

"Well, we need doctors, too," said Velichko. "Come and join us."

My brother and I worked for over a month in Velichko's brigade.

At that time the Germans were organising large-scale punitive operations against partisan units, and there were battles every day. We moved from the Vysoké to the Nizké Tatry and back, circled around in the mountains, but the ring kept tightening.

Up to 6 December, our wounded were with us in the partisan hospital in a valley near the village of Zverovka. However, on 7 December the situation became so bad that the

brigade commander ordered them to be transferred from the village to a hunter's cabin deep in a mountain forest. Either my brother or myself had to go with the brigade, and the other stay behind to look after the wounded in the cabin. Until then my brother and I had never been apart, but this time it was unavoidable...

We sat down together and smoked in silence, not wanting to talk about which of us would remain in the cabin, and which go with the brigade.

However, in order to examine the wounded, we set off for the cabin, and decided that the first one to arrive there would be the one who remained.

We set off along different paths. I arrived first—and remained.

I had, of course, seen such hunter's cabins before, but I had never had to live in one for more than one or two days. Now I had to stay here for more than two months, and not alone but together with the sick and the wounded.

And what was it like, this cabin? It was very small, about five metres long and three metres wide. As I am rather tall, I could not stand upright. There were no walls, only a foundation of stones and earth, and the roof began at ground level. There was one tiny window and a brick stove with an iron pipe which passed through a hole in the roof.

There were fifteen of us altogether—myself, the two Slovak sisters Katerina and Božena, the Slovak partisan Jan Choleša, who had stayed as our guard, and eleven sick and wounded. On one side of the cabin there were two bunks on which we placed the two most seriously wounded. They were in splints and unable to move. A narrow passage separated them from the other bunks, on which the rest of the wounded lay crosswise. We, the four looking after them, lay on the floor in the narrow passage between the bunks. When the wind blew through the cracks in the cabin, we were frozen. At first we tried filling some of the cracks with moss, but then the wounded pulled the dry moss out of the cracks to use as tobacco.

The partisans had brought to the cabin all the provisions they could spare to last us for ten days. When the ten days were up, they were to bring us fresh supplies. I also hoped that the situation would improve with medical supplies; meanwhile I had hot water and fifteen grammes of manganese, which I guarded with my life. I had, it was true, noted another medicine on my way to the cabin: there were a few oak trees in this pine forest, and it occurred to me that if my patients had stomach trouble, I could grind up some oak bark and make tannin powder. Later on I indeed had to do just that.

Oaks were a rarity so high up in the mountains, and all around us were pine trees. The cabin itself was surrounded by spruce, and you could pass within five metres of it and not notice it.

Not far from the cabin, between rocks, there was a small spring which never froze. Sometimes the water gushed out, sometimes it was reduced to a trickle. Later we made a hollow in the ice, and enough water collected there to satisfy our needs.

Among the wounded were three Slovaks, one Czech and seven Russians. Apart from one or two, all were either seriously wounded or suffering from heavy frost-bite, and would take some time to recover. There was no question of our moving in the near future.

A day and a half passed. On the ninth, in the morning, we heard the noise of a fierce battle, and at nightfall fifty men arrived at the cabin—all that was left of the Stefaník brigade. For almost two days they had been engaged in heavy fighting with the Germans, and had only just succeeded in breaking through the encirclement and disappearing deep into the mountains.

In order to continue their struggle they had to cross the Tatry as quickly as possible, make a fresh camp and gather the units and groups that had scattered with the defeat of the uprising. There could be no question of their taking the seriously wounded with them across the mountains. They would never have made it.

I will never forget that night we all spent in the cabin. My brother, who had come with the partisans, and I had a great deal of work to do binding up fresh wounds. The partisans were gloomy, unable to forget the fierce battle in which so many had been killed. The wounded were worried. They had thought that the brigade would remain somewhere nearby, not expecting that it would leave the Tatry.

In fact the ones who were leaving did not even spend one full night in the cabin. Towards morning the snowstorm began to drop, and in order not to leave behind tracks which might betray the wounded, the commander decided to leave at dawn, when their tracks might still be blown over.

How we found room for another fifty men in addition to ourselves I could not now say, but somehow we did. We were all lying on top of each other, and by morning our arms and legs were so numb that we had difficulty getting up. There was little conversation. The wounded did not sleep but looked questioningly at those who were going to leave. The brigade commander was lying by the window, smoking one

cigarette after another. At dawn everyone began to get up. Two of the partisans, one of whom was wounded in the chest, and the other in the shoulder and the arm, pulled on their greatcoats.

"What are you getting dressed for?" asked the commander.

"We're going with you," they replied.

And they did indeed leave with the detachment.

The rest of the wounded, who were quite unable to leave, had such expressions on their faces, such a look of desperation in their eyes, that they seemed to be continually pleading: "Take us with you."

The commander shook everyone's hand, and then said to me:

"Doctor, listen: even if it costs the lives of some of our comrades, you'll get supplies from us, wherever we are."

My brother left with the detachment. At that moment I was busy dressing a wound. My hands were covered in blood and pus, so we were unable to shake hands, but just nodded to each other silently, and he left.

The snowstorm had still not died down, and it quickly obliterated their traces.

We were left completely alone.

That day was indeed dreadful. Loneliness! Everyone was seized with depression. So was I. The cabin was filled with the putrid smell of infected wounds. I realised that only the seriously wounded had stayed behind, and the lack of medicine meant I could do almost nothing to help them. I was prepared to do everything I could, but how could I get hold of medicines? Moreover, my brother, a more experienced doctor, had left. In short, I was feeling very low, but there was no other way out. I had to do something quickly to try to save their lives.

In addition, the situation as regards provisions was also not very promising. Following the battles which the unit had waged in the surrounding district, the Germans had cordoned off all the nearby villages—Zuberec, Habovka, Huta, Bílý potok—and in the Zverov Valley beneath us they had set up a firing range which it was very difficult to cross.

"How am I going to feed the wounded?" I asked myself.

All our supplies were in one tightly packed kitbag. True, the partisans who had stayed overnight had not eaten any of our food, and some had even left what little they had—a pinch of tobacco, some bread. However, that was also very meagre.

In the evening of that same day, before nightfall, two German units passed close by our cabin, one to the left, the

other to the right. I am still amazed at our good luck, because one of them passed just a hundred and fifty metres from our cabin, higher up the mountain. We could hear the voices of the Germans very clearly, and they could hear ours, as they had appeared unexpectedly.

From that day on I introduced a regulation: loud conversation only at night. During the day we talked quietly, or whispered. Furthermore, this incident taught me that I could not remain simply a doctor, but would also have to become garrison commandant; we organised an observation post at which I, Božena, Katerina and Jan Choleša kept watch in turn.

Thus did our life begin. In the mornings we could hear the Germans shooting on the firing range. In the afternoon, and sometimes at night as well, we could hear the distant sound of gunfire. This meant that partisan groups were still in the vicinity, and the Germans were hunting them down.

We had to face many difficulties. The wounded needed warmth, but we could not light the stove during the day: even the slightest smoke might be noticed by the Germans. We lit the stove only at night, and the cabin was icy cold during the day. We needed firewood. We could not saw the wood as the sound of the saw would be carried a kilometre through the frosty mountain air, and a German guard-post was stationed permanently not far away. We had to collect fallen branches and dry logs, and then saw it all in the cabin. So that the saw did not squeak two of us would hold it not by the handles but by the blade and slowly move it, while two others tightly clasped the log. When there were no branches and we dragged back with us a fallen pine tree, the cabin froze for the whole day: we could not drag the whole pine tree into the cabin, but only the top, which we then sawed off, dragged the pine tree in a bit further, sawed some more off, and so on till we had sawn up the entire tree.

As we could not light the stove during the day, mealtime was early in the morning. The stove was lit through the night. Some of the wounded only went off to sleep in the early hours of the morning, and it was difficult to wake them up. However, we could only give them warm food in the morning, and so we had to wake them every morning before dawn.

Changing the dressings followed the same pattern. My main means of disinfectant was manganese and boiling water, and therefore I changed the dressings at night and early in the morning. I woke the seriously wounded earlier so as

to be able to feed them first, and then, when they had had something to eat, change their dressings.

Most worrying of all, of course, was the lack of medicine. This was the most difficult problem. Sometimes I felt powerless, but I wanted to save all of these people. It was painful to look at them, and I was obliged to make each of them suffer every morning. I had none of the ointments which enable a doctor to change the dressings only every two or three days. In order to prevent the wounds from turning septic, I had to wash and dress them every day, unavoidably causing the patient agonising pain. For transverse wounds, for example, which had turned septic and which had to be cleansed every day, I had only a long, thin piece of rubber. I passed this piece of rubber through the wound, stretched it tight and used it for drainage.

Almost all my patients were wounded in the leg. Many were wearing splints, and did not have enough room on their short bunks for their straight, immobilised leg. Therefore we attached ropes to the splints, and suspended them from the ceiling. They were so cramped for space that sometimes, when they got up, they would knock into each other, and the sisters, weary from sleeplessness, would also accidentally bump into them as they tried to pass between the bunks. The pain that even the slightest contact can cause in such circumstances is better not described.

I had fifteen grammes of manganese, and I kept it in a small bag under my shirt so as not to spill any or lose it. I dissolved it in boiling water to wash the wounds. Frost-bite was treated using the traditional method of alternate hot and cold baths.

On the fifth or sixth day, when our meagre supplies were beginning to run out, some of the wounded went down with dysentery. I did not know what to do, but tried to look cheerful and told them that I had hidden medicine in the forest.

In fact I had no medicine hidden in the forest, but I had remembered the oak trees, and decided to grind up oak bark to make a powder against dysentery. I did this without letting the patients know, as it was important that they should believe in these powders. I tore off a few pieces of bark and then, at night, when they were all asleep, I ground them up. It so happened that I had some pharmaceutical powder papers in my kitbag. Having ground up the oak bark, I carefully poured the powder into these papers, folded them up to resemble genuine pharmaceutical packets and gave them to my patients. I was happy to notice that a week later the dysentery had stopped.

During all this time the Germans were hunting for partisans, all around us, pursuing even one man by himself. They were searching not only for people, but for lodges and cabins in the mountains where partisans could hide during that harsh winter. When they found any such shelter they burned it down.

At night we could always see the light of a fire above the tops of the trees, always something was burning somewhere.

In addition, during the day, and particularly at night, the Germans swept the mountains with random shell-fire in order to panic the partisans.

On one such day chief of staff of the Suvorov unit, Seleznev, arrived at our cabin. Although I had seen him before, I did not recognise him. He looked dreadful, frozen with cold and his clothes torn. A week earlier, when the Germans had surrounded their unit, he had been elsewhere on an assignment, and had lost contact with his men. He had searched for them afterwards, but been unable to find them. He had been wandering in the mountains for six days, and had had nothing to eat. Wherever he went he had seen cabins burning, and had had the feeling that the mountains were ringed with fire. When he arrived at our "hospital" and saw that people were coming towards him, Božena and I, he collapsed onto the snow unconscious.

Seleznev spent seven days with us. He helped us to organise an observation post at a better place than before, and when he was a little better, used to set out to reconnoitre the area roundabout. On the second or third time he went, he came across scouts from Captain Tikhonov's unit. Although he was still very ill, he decided to leave with the scouts, knowing that we had very few supplies left, and that these were needed by the wounded. He gave a note to Jan Choleša, who was with them.

"Doctor! I would be ashamed to stay and eat the food of the wounded. I have met up with partisans. I'm leaving with them. Goodbye."

That was how we said farewell to Seleznev.

Over the next few days all seemed a little quieter: the fires had ceased, and the Germans were not shooting as much. On his departure, my brother had left me a note in which he described a spot in the Zverov Valley where he had buried a small supply of medicine under a pine tree which he had marked. Up till then it had been impossible to get there, as the Germans had set up their firing range on the very same spot. Now, however, the Germans had moved about a kilometre away.

I decided to go and search, whatever the risk, for this

medicine. However, I was in for a serious disappointment. My brother had marked the tree near the roots so that the mark would not be very visible, and over previous two weeks a metre and a half of snow had fallen in the Tatry. My brother, hoping that the mark would be visible, had not given me any other particular indications.

I went down into the valley three nights running and dug out the snow around a dozen trees, but could not find the mark. There were thousands of trees in the valley... And although I knew that somewhere here lay buried medicine which I desperately needed, I had to abandon all hopes of finding it.

On the third morning, on returning from a futile search, I met a Slovak in the valley, one of our partisan scouts from the village of Habovka. From him I learned that during the last few days we had been close to death in the cabin.

We had been advised to use this cabin by Ludvik Maier, a forester who had given a great deal of help to the partisans during the uprising. After the battles in the Zverov Valley, when the Germans had burned down all the cabins and houses in the vicinity, they had also burned down the forester's house. Maier and his wife had gone to Habovka. There, traitors had told the Germans that he had sheltered partisans. The Germans had just caught a member of our brigade—we never found out who exactly—and after beatings during his interrogation he had said that somewhere in the mountains nearby there was a partisan hospital. The Germans sent for the forester and said:

"You must know where their hospital is, and you must take us there."

They spoke through a Czech interpreter. This interpreter, when interpreting what the Germans had said, added in the same tone of voice:

"If you know and you tell them where this hospital is, I will shoot you."

Maier simply looked at him and smiled, indicating with his eyes that there was nothing to worry about. Then he asked the interpreter to tell the Germans that he knew where the hospital was.

The Germans then got ready to go, and Maier took them to the path to the Zverov Valley. Our hospital was located higher up, on the right, but the forester took them down to the left, and lower down. He knew that there was a cabin there which Jews had once used when hiding from the Gestapo. He took the Germans to this cabin and said:

"This is the cabin where there used to be a partisan hospital."

The cabin was, of course, empty. The Germans asked:
"How can you prove that there was a hospital here?"
Maier replied:
"I can prove it by the fact that there are signs of habitation and a supply of food."
"And where are the wounded?"
Maier answered that the partisans had no doubt taken their wounded with them.

The Germans searched the cabin and indeed found remains of a food supply. They believed his story that this had been a partisan hospital and let Maier go.

Thus we had escaped seemingly inevitable death.

Slowly one of my patients, a Slovak named Anton Huta, began to improve. I was able to leave Jan Choleša to guard the "hospital", and set out to reconnoitre with Huta. We tried to reach a village in order to get some food, but all the villages were still cut off by the Germans, and German guards were posted nearby. We had absolutely nothing to eat.

I was beginning to despair. Then, on one of our reconnaissance trips, we met a partisan from Tikhonov's unit, and he told us that he had seen an abandoned horse in the Rogačev Valley the day before. On hearing that, we did not return to the "hospital", but went straight to the Rogačev Valley.

To get there we had to walk twenty-five kilometres through deep snow. We walked all night and arrived only the following morning. Right at the bottom of the valley we indeed found traces of an abandoned partisan camp, shreds torn from tents, a bag of lentils, half of which had tipped out onto the snow, and an old, bony horse, the sight of which gladdened us as nothing had ever done before.

We spent a long time gathering the scattered lentils, and collected, as it later turned out, around ten kilogrammes. We loaded the lentils onto the horse and set off back.

We arrived towards evening. On learning that we had brought back lentils and a horse, the wounded were beside themselves with joy. We tethered the horse to a tree next to the cabin with cords from an old parachute, and decided to slaughter it the next morning. I spent until midnight calculating how long the horsemeat would last us if I rationed it to 150 grammes per person per day.

After all these calculations, deadly tired, I slept like a log, knowing that we would not be threatened with starvation for 25 to 30 days.

Morning came. One of the wounded, Sergeant-Major Ivan Reshetnev, had worked at an abattoir as a young

man. Now, however, he was suffering from frost-bitten feet and was almost unable to walk. We bound his feet with cloth and tied them round with cords so that he could go outside. He took with him our only axe, I picked up the bucket, and we went out, followed by two or three of the patients who were able to move about.

Suddenly, to our horror, we discovered that the horse was not there. During the night it had broken free of the cords tying it to the tree and had run off. One of us found the strength to joke and said:

"That's rather odd! Perhaps the horse was a German spy?"

Nobody smiled at the joke, the disappearance of the horse doomed us to starvation.

I set off with the Slovak, Jan Kovač, whose condition was improving, in search of the horse. Fortunately, the traces were easy to follow. They led to the Zverov Valley. However, from there we could hear the sound of gunfire. It seemed that the Germans had again set up a firing range. Suddenly the tracks turned to the right.

We followed the tracks all day. Finally they led us to the same valley where we had found the horse last time. We saw it standing dejectedly in virtually the same spot.

Our feelings at that moment can be understood only by someone who knows that fifteen hungry mouths are waiting for him.

We caught the horse and, without losing a moment, made our way back. About five kilometres away from our cabin, in the forest, we came across a man who was crawling through the snow on all fours. We went up to him. He was a Russian partisan from the Suvorov unit, Maxim Oleinikov. He just managed to tell us his name, tried to say something else, but was virtually unconscious.

Later on we learned that a few days previously Maxim had gone out to scout. The Germans had spotted the scouts and opened up machine-gun fire. Maxim's comrades had been killed. He had got trapped under the ice while trying to cross a stream, freed himself and finally arrived at the village of Zuberec, which was also occupied by Germans. The local peasants had secretly given him some bread and slippers—he could not get any other kind of footwear on his frost-bitten feet. He had not been able to stay in the village, as there were Germans in almost every house. He had left for the mountains, where he had lost his way and nearly frozen to death. We put him on the horse and took him back with us, supporting him on both sides.

We slaughtered the horse, and cooked ourselves meat for

the first time in many days. The meat tasted like a feast of goose. Near the cabin we dug a deep hole in the snow and buried the rest of the meat so it would not go bad.

Sergeant-Major Ivan Reshetnev, a jack of all trades, fashioned uppers out of blankets and made soles out of horsehide to make us shoes: by that time we were almost barefoot. We began to go scouting wearing these shoes, which had the added advantage of leaving such strange tracks that they might be more easily mistaken for the footprints of some curious animal than those of a man.

In short, everything was put to some use.

Two or three days later, however, our supply of salt came to an end. We put up with this for a few days, and then decided to try to find some.

Anton Huta, another patient and myself went down to Zverov Valley, and then further, to the village of Zuberec. However, literally five to ten metres from the house on the edge of the village we heard Germans talking. There were still German patrols in the village. It was a quiet night with no signs of a snowstorm, and we had come so close that our tracks would be visible the next morning.

We decided to return to our cabin by different routes, circling round in order to confuse the Germans. We wanted to create the impression that quite a number of people had passed this way, so we dragged our feet, making an almost continuous track.

Finally, taking different routes, we all arrived at the agreed spot, where a deep spring flowed down the side of the rock. We began to scale the rock along the water course, and only stepped back onto the snow when we were considerably higher up. Our legs were icy cold, and even in the cabin we had difficulty warming up.

Around this time I had a new worry. Maxim Oleinikov was in a far more serious condition than the rest of my patients. I only had to look at his feet to see that they were almost moribund, so badly frost-bitten that it would be difficult to save them.

I did all I could—cold and hot baths, and rubbing with manganese, but the flesh had already turned septic and was decaying. I knew there was nothing left but to operate, otherwise he would die. I wanted to save him if I possibly could, and all the more so as I had never in all my life seen such a patient and good-hearted man.

Many of the wounded were irritable, groaned, but he, even when I was cleaning his feet, never made a sound. On the contrary, he tried to cheer me up:

"It's alright, doctor."

I always admired his courage, and I wanted to save him, but I had none of the things I needed to do an operation. Meanwhile his condition was deteriorating. He had a high temperature, and I realised that if I did not operate, he would die from blood poisoning. Yet I had absolutely nothing, not even most rudimentary medical equipment...

Then we received our first news from our partisan brigade. It happened just before dawn, while I was changing the dressings. Jan Choleša was sleeping after being on guard. Katerina was helping me, and Božena was on guard at the observation post with an automatic rifle.

The door opened and Božena came into the cabin. I was just about to say: "Why have you left your post!" when she shouted:

"They've come!"

For a moment I did not even understood who it was who had come, but the next moment I saw behind her the familiar face of the Transcarpathian Ukrainian Misha—I don't recall his surname—who was in our brigade. He slipped a kitbag off his shoulder and put it down on the floor by my feet. All the wounded shouted: "Misha! Misha!", and began to ask him what he had brought and whether there was any tobacco.

A blanket was laid on the floor, and Misha began to unpack the kitbag. He had not brought any tobacco, but gave them six of his own cigarettes. We made them last six days: one cigarette a day amongst us. Each of the wounded men took one draw and then passed the cigarette on.

Misha had brought one and a half kilogrammes of salt, a little rice, a little pig fat, and three bars of chocolate. He had had to walk over a hundred kilometres and cross two mountain ranges, and therefore he had not been able to carry more than fifteen kilogrammes; five kilogrammes there and back for himself, and ten for us. It took him five days to reach us, and five days to return, and all of this for just ten kilogrammes of food.

That night the wounded asked Misha about the brigade, who was still alive, who had been killed, and he answered as best he could. On the whole he had brought good news: the brigade had been reinforced, but the situation was still difficult and they were constantly engaged in battles.

Thereafter, while our "hospital" continued to exist, Misha made four such trips taking forty days in all. Moreover, on each occasion he was in such a hurry that he never had a full night's sleep but, having arrived at night, rested for an hour or two and then set off back again before dawn...

Having seen Misha, I decided to operate on Oleinikov,

and gave Misha a note to be handed to the brigade commander requesting scissors, a knife, a saw and, if possible, some analgesic. I explained to Misha that it was very important for me to get these items as quickly as possible, even more important than food.

I waited for twelve days for him to return. During all this time Oleinikov's life was hanging in the balance. Clearly, the washing, and hot and cold baths only tormented him. He had lost all his strength, and only iron will-power prevented him from crying out, moaning and upsetting the other patients.

On the thirteenth day Misha returned, bringing whatever the brigade had been able to spare: a large, ordinary penknife, ordinary scissors, a carpenter's saw and a pincette. My brother had sent a note: he had shared out whatever he had, and had sent his one and only pincette.

In order to feel more in form, before the operation I slept longer than usual, almost until midday.

When night fell, as soon as the water boiled, I began the operation. Katerina, who was a nurse and was to be my assistant, stared in amazement on learning that I had decided to go ahead. However, on seeing her surprise, I stopped her from saying anything, as the decision had been a difficult one to take. She boiled the knife, the saw and the pincette, and also the pieces of parachute which we used to cover our makeshift operating table, which was, in fact, not a table but the corner of a bunk stripped of blankets.

A few of the wounded who were feeling a little better gathered round to help me. They cut tapers for light. Božena held the tapers to light up the "operating table". Anton Huta bound Oleinikov's legs tightly above the knees with parachute cords, and then held them. Božena passed me the instruments.

The bunks were low, and I had to kneel. The tapers gave only a little light, and I did not have the necessary instruments. However, my main anxiety was not the physical difficulties involved, but the moral responsibility, because I was not sure whether I could save him, or whether I was merely adding extra torment before he died. However, I had no other choice—I had to operate.

I began on the left foot. I sawed off the toes, and there was a heavy loss of blood. I looked for the blood vessels which I had to bind in order to stop the flow. I tried not to think of Oleinikov. However, he tried to help me as best he could, now lying quietly, now singing Russian songs in a barely audible voice. What he was feeling I would not like to imagine.

I operated on the left foot for two and a half hours. When I had finished, I bandaged the whole foot and the flow of blood stopped. However, I could not immediately continue the operation because I had been kneeling for two and a half hours without a break. I lay down on the floor and stretched out my benumbed legs. I had to lie there for about twenty minutes before the feeling returned to them.

I then began to operate on the right foot, which was more seriously frost-bitten than the left. When I had sawn off the toes, I discovered that the blood vessels and flesh had decayed to such a point that it was difficult to find where to bind the blood vessels to stop the flow of blood. Finally I succeeded, and this operation was also over.

When I had finished I was tormented by the question of whether it had been in vain, whether the operation would prove a failure.

I went outside into the frosty night. Perspiration was running down my face, and I did not notice the cold. Katerina, who had helped me throughout, followed me, sat down on the snow and burst into tears.

"Come on now, stop crying," I tried to calm her. "Stop crying, do you hear?"

"I didn't cry in there," she said, "during the operation."

"If you had, I would have hit you," I told her. I returned to the cabin and went up to Oleinikov... He was lying on his back, his eyes closed and singing something, but so quietly, in such a feeble voice, that the words were barely audible.

For the next two days, until his temperature returned to normal, I could not settle day or night. Then his temperature came down and his condition improved. I realised that probably he would live.

The days passed. The horse disappointed our expectations: it proved to have far less meat than we had supposed. We had to ration it to one hundred grammes a day. Our daily menu was soup made from horsemeat and lentils. We shared it out as follows: first everyone was given his portion of meat, then his share of the soup in our one tin mug, and finally, when there were only the lentils left at the bottom of the pan, Božena, who was our chef, counted out ten lentils for each of us. There was no danger of a mistake, as the lentils were measured out into the pan not according to weight but number.

As is always the case with very hungry people, this meagre meal held an important place in our life, was often spoken about, and eagerly awaited. I would even say that we finally adapted to this scant ration. Far more difficult was

the lack of anything to smoke. Later Misha brought us not six cigarettes but ten, and even fifteen—all that our comrades could spare from their own supply—but what were even fifteen cigarettes for ten days in our "hospital"?

During one of the wearisome evenings when Misha had been absent for a long time—fourteen or fifteen days—and everyone was longing for a smoke, one of the patients, Vassili Tkachenko if I remember, suddenly said:

"Don't you remember, lads, when the brigade commander spent the night here (more than six weeks had passed since then), he smoked, didn't he?"

"Probably, yes," the others agreed. "Three or four roll-your-owns. Where was he lying?"

"Here, by the window."

"Vassili Tkachenko leavered himself down from his bunk, went to the spot which had been occupied by the brigade commander, and began to rummage around in the corner, among the stones which had been used to fill in the gap between the lowest logs and the floor. He did not find all four cigarette ends, but he did find two.

That night, prior to leaving, the commander had been worried and had not smoked his cigarettes to the end. There was still some tobacco in both butts. Tkachenko tipped it carefully into the palm of his hand, then added a little moss, and the mixture was then rolled up into one rather fat cigarette. It was passed round, each eagerly taking a draw. It was large enough to be passed round twice, two draws each, including myself.

To be frank, however, life became more difficult with each passing day. Apart from the problems with food and tobacco, we were depressed by the fact that this was now our second month in the cabin but, although most of the wounded felt much better and even moved around, there could be no question of our undertaking a major expedition by ourselves.

It was a harsh winter. Imagine our typical winter's day towards the end of two months. Through the one, frost-covered little window comes just enough light to reveal the miserable picture of our life: the ceiling is white with frost; if we light the stove, water trickles from the walls; the wind sends flakes of snow rapping against the window. Meanwhile we sit inside, occasionally talking to each other and wondering what we might use for bandages. The wounds have to be redressed every day, but there is nothing left to make bandages out of. To begin with I had a small supply, but boiling and reboiling had reduced them to shreds. We also had pieces of parachute from which we

made bandages, but these had also finished. Then I ordered the patients to take off their underwear and sit in their top clothes, or simply wrap a blanket around themselves. Their underwear had to be used for bandages.

We were also troubled by our total lack of information about what was happening outside. Very often, particularly in the evening when we were too cold and hungry to go to sleep, we would talk for a long time about what message we would hear from Moscow if we had a radio, and what might have happened during our stay here. Everyone gave his imagination free rein.

We learned almost nothing new, even when Misha came. He told us about the brigade, but during the battles they had lost their portable wireless and even they had no news about what was happening elsewhere.

A great deal of time was taken up with hygiene. We all felt that it would be dangerous to let ourselves go in this difficult situation, and so, when it was possible to stoke up the stove and heat a lot of water, we not only changed dressings and boiled the bandages, but also tried to have a wash ourselves.

One of the wounded, Jan Krepisčak, had previously been a barber, and the scissors which Misha had brought and which I had used to operate on Oleinikov were now put to their proper use: we were all gradually given a haircut. We were in no hurry, for we had nowhere to go.

At the very end of the second month there was an incident which nearly proved fatal. I completely forgot to say that during the first month an old Slovak, a cook who had left one of our units, had arrived at our cabin. He was neither wounded nor ill, but simply old and had been unable to cross the mountains with the other partisans. We took him in. He made no particular impression for good or bad, lived as we did and tried to help as best he could.

At the beginning of February, when we were again having food problems, the cook volunteered to go down into the valley and, hoping no one would suspect an old man, make his way to the village and bring back some food. I did not want to let him go, but he insisted, and our food supply was at an end. I let him go.

As I was told later, he arrived safely at the village, collected some food and set off on his way back. The Germans, however, had seen him arrive and had deliberately let him collect some food so as to follow him when he left.

This incident would surely have proved fatal for us if one of the Germans had not shouted after the cook as he tried to catch up with him. On hearing this call in German, the cook

began to run. The Germans opened fire on him, and a bullet passed through his lung. He fell. When the Germans ran up to him, he asked them to take him somewhere and help him, and then he would tell them everything.

We never learned whether this was a trick on his part to win time and save us, or whether he had indeed taken fright and would have told them about our cabin. No one will ever know, because by the time the Germans had carried him to the village he was dead.

This incident caused us trouble. The Germans suspected that someone was hiding in the vicinity and again began to shell the mountainside.

One day I was standing at the observation post about one hundred and fifty metres from the cabin, when I heard someone shouting in Slovak for help. My first reaction was to set off to find out who was calling for help, believing it was probably a wounded or frozen partisan.

Fortunately, Sergeant-Major Reshetnev was with me. He was always very cautious, and he told me:

"Just a moment, doctor. Perhaps it's the Germans setting a trap. Let's wait a little."

We kept very quiet and waited. Several more shouts for help in Slovak came from below, and then I clearly heard someone speaking in German:

"No, let's move on, there's no one here."

The Germans then moved another three hundred metres or so and I again heard them call in Slovak: "Help! Help!"

Reshetnev had been right, it was a trap.

Two days later, two of the wounded set off to scout and went down into the Zverov Valley. There they met some peasants from a nearby village who told them that a major Russian offensive had begun, and that the Germans stationed in the village had left.

They went with a peasant to the village, took some food (they did not try to collect much, as they were in a hurry to tell us the news), and returned to the cabin that evening.

The next day I took three of the patients, those who were able to walk, and set off down to the valley to collect more food and find out what was happening in detail.

However, we had barely reached the Zverov Valley when we realised something was afoot. Smoke was coming from that direction. We went further down. Bonfires were burning in the valley, and as we hid behind some trees we could see the Germans sawing down trees. They were building something like a blockhouse. There was absolutely no chance of our being able to reach the village.

It turned out that the Russian offensive had indeed begun. The German guard unit had been removed from the village, but front-line units had come in its place.

The two wounded men bitterly bewailed having hurried to bring us the good news and so few provisions with them, but there was nothing to be done about it. All we had left was half the horse's head.

It was time to do something to try to save the wounded men. It was impossible to stay in the cabin any longer.

I knew the area quite well, and could visualise the route we would have to take to reach the Russians. From the scrappy information brought by our scouts, and from what Misha told us, it seemed that the front-line was just about forty-five to fifty kilometres to the northeast, and that the Polish border resort of Zakopane was already in Russian hands. I decided to make my way there to fetch help, and move the wounded to territory occupied by Soviet troops.

I had neither map nor compass. It would be a difficult journey, and I could not, of course, take any food with me at all. I had no warm clothing, just trousers and a jacket over bare skin, and on my feet the shoes which Reshetnev had made from horsehide.

I decided to cross the Rogačev Valley, then another valley, and then cross the Vysoké Tatry and from there make my way to Zakopane. This was the most remote and certainly not the most direct route, but I believed it would enable me to avoid German pickets and guard posts...

I will not describe my journey. It is difficult for me to recall it now. I simply continued to walk, telling myself that I had to make it, that if I died it would be not just my death but the death of all those I had left behind in the cabin.

It took me sixty hours to reach Zakopane. I did not meet a single German. Just once I heard gunfire far away to the right and the left: very probably I was then crossing the front-line..

Zakopane is a famous Polish resort, and I had been there before. It is a beautiful town with hotels and fine houses. It seemed that the war had not touched it.

I was in such a hurry to reach the Soviet commandant that at first I did not notice how people in the street were staring at me. I now realise that my appearance must have been very strange indeed: ragged clothing over a bare body, dishevelled hair, an automatic rifle over my shoulder and virtually barefoot.

I sat in the commandant's office telling my story and eating. I recall that I was afraid I would fall asleep: such

a feeling of warmth was seeping through my body that sleep might have overtaken me at any moment.

There were no troops in the town, all had gone on ahead, and there was just the small team of the commandant and his assistants.

"What can I do to help?" the commandant asked me.

I asked for a guide who would help me find people I needed in the town.

I had once been a mountain-climber and knew a few good mountaineers in Zakopane who would be of more use to me than anyone else. I must say to the credit of the Polish sportsmen living in Zakopane that I had found fourteen to help me in as little as two hours. All those I asked agreed to help save the wounded.

From among those who joined me I would like to mention the brothers Vojtech, Jakov and Stanislav Vovridko, Szymon Zarzycki, Stanislaw Marusicz, and the brothers Stanislaw and Jacek Gąsienic; others followed their example.

Five days after I left the wounded, we reached the cabin. It would be difficult to describe their joy and mine. We all broke down and cried.

I do not know the details of that meeting: I reached the cabin, told the wounded to get ready to leave, and immediately fell asleep. When they woke me up, everyone was ready.

The experienced mountaineers had brought extra pairs of skis with them. For those among the wounded who were totally unable to walk, they tied several pairs of skis together, fastened planks to them and covered them with a bed of fir branches.

The wounded were then firmly bound to these home-made sledges. In some places the thick snow gave way, and we often had to dig the sledges out.

The girls, who were very weak, kept sinking into the snow and several times we had to carry them.

We had no warm footwear, and everyone had wrapped their feet in pieces of cloth. Sometimes I began to drowse, at others I was siezed with anxiety lest someone suffer from frost-bite, and walked down the column of men asking them to take care of their feet.

It was particularly difficult in the mountain passes, where the wind had blown away the snow, leaving only ice-covered, jagged rock which we nonetheless had to negotiate. We attached eight-metre ropes to our sledges. The mountaineers went ahead, crawling on all fours, broke the ice and then dragged the sledges across. They knocked in a peg, wrapped the cord around it to prevent the sledge from

slipping backwards, made another foothold, knocked in another peg, wound the cord from one peg to another and then went ahead again.

It took us twenty-six hours to cross the pass, cross the front-line undetected by the Germans, and arrive in the Kocholovské Valley, territory already liberated by Soviet troops and where sledges were waiting for us as I had previously agreed with the commandant in Zakopane.

All the wounded were placed on the sledges and taken to the hospital in Zakopane. The girls and I also found ourselves in the hospital. At the gates I thanked the Polish mountaineers on behalf of the wounded. The wounded themselves were half dead with fatigue, and none of them had the strength even to move his lips to say thank you or goodbye.

I do not recall going into the hospital, or undressing and washing. I was put into bed somewhere and fell asleep. I awoke only a little less than forty-eight hours later.

There you have the whole story. A couple of weeks later someone told me what happened to our cabin. It was as if some sixth sense had prompted us to leave in time. The day after we left, the Germans finally found it and burned it down.

Two days later Soviet troops occupied the area, and the partisans from our brigade who had joined up with them found only charred timbers and were horrified at the thought of what had happened to us.

It was only later that they learned that we were alive and well, and that this episode, which had lasted over two months, had had a happy conclusion.

1945

VLADIMIR TRIBUTS

Battle for the Danish Island of Bornholm

Vladimir Tributs (1900-1977)—Admiral of the Soviet Navy. During the war he was Commander of the Baltic Fleet, and took part in the defence of Tallinn and Leningrad, and in battles in the Baltic republics and East Prussia.

This extract from the memoirs of Admiral Tributz describes the liberation of the island of Bornholm (Denmark) by Soviet amphibious assault force.

Towards the end of April 1945, there remained two major sectors in the Baltic. The troops of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky were advancing on one of them—along the shore of the Baltic Sea to Kolberg-Swinemünde-Rostock. They had already taken Stettin (Szczecin) and were preparing to storm the enemy's most important naval base—Swinemünde (Swinoujscie). A number of blockaded enemy garrisons on this sector were continuing to put up strong resistance. The second major sector of offensive led to the Kurland enemy group and the ports Libava and Vindava which fed it.

The commanders of the Second and Third Byelorussian Fronts demanded that the fleet support their troops' flanks and aid in eliminating separate enemy bridgeheads on the first of the above-mentioned sectors. Commander-in-Chief of the Navy N.G. Kuznetsov also considered this sector to be the main one. He demanded that the air force and light forces of the fleet be concentrated precisely in this area, having in mind the possibility that amphibious task forces could liberate the island of Rügen and the Nazi-occupied Danish Island of Bornholm, where strong enemy forces were concentrated.

Nazi command was using Bornholm as a base for manoeuvring. This was where battered troops evacuated from the Baltic shore areas were being sent. It's interesting that the island garrison, numbering over 12,000 troops, had orders from its command to surrender "only to British forces" and was holding out for the unfolding of events.

Meanwhile, our fleet's air force regiments had attack aircraft, torpedo aircraft and fighters concentrated at one of the airfields nearest to Bornholm. A sizeable number of our torpedo boats stood in the harbour. Moving up on this area were the troops detached by order of Marshal Rokossovsky and earmarked for the island landing.

On the eve of May 1, we were informed that the troops under Marshal Rokossovsky were to begin their attack on Swinemünde. The fleet's air force was assigned the task of preventing enemy ships from firing at the flanks of our troops and of continuing its assault on warships and transport ships.

At the same time, the troops under the command of Marshal L.A. Govorov were making ready for a major assault on the second main sector of attack. Here the fleet's task was to be ready to land a task force consisting of one division and five machine-gun artillery battalions. Thorough preparation for carrying out this task was being conducted under the leadership of Rear Admiral V.S. Cherokov and his staff. Air force units were partly concentrated at airfields located in immediate proximity to the landing points. Submarines were deployed to cover the Irbeni Strait and keep enemy ships from getting through.

On our sectors the enemy still had enough forces to defend the surrounded bridgeheads. Here the fighting continued.

The fleet's air force kept up its attack. In April it had made 5,777 operational flights, destroying 13 enemy transport ships and two tankers. In the first days of May, when Marshal Rokossovsky's troops began the battle for the Swinemünde naval base, the Baltic pilots concentrated their attacks mainly on warships and transport ships in roadsteads of Stettin Bay. Overcast skies kept the air force from making a massive assault, but towards the evening of May 3, Lieutenant Brichko's group of attack aircraft broke through to the target all the same and, in extraordinarilly difficult weather conditions, dropped their bombs on enemy ships and vessels. Immediately following this, air reconnaissance reported that, having been damaged, an enemy battleship was listing to the bow. Orders came down to pool efforts and destroy it.

A few more air attacks, and the battleship *Schlesien*, which had lately been used by the Nazi command to support its troops, was put out of action once and for all. During these same few days the sailors of the Baltic Fleet had also sunk the auxiliary cruiser *Orion*, four large transport ships, the torpedo boat *T-36* and the floating battery *Hummel*.

On May 5, Marshal Rokossovsky's troops, aided by the air force, took Swinemünde. This meant that from that day on the entire eastern and southern shore of the Baltic Sea from the Gulf of Finland to Rostock, with the exception of the Kurland bridgehead, had been liberated from the invaders.

The enemy made a feverish effort to try and evacuate at least part of its troops and equipment to the ports of Germany.

Immediately after the seizure of Swinemünde, the garrison

on Rügen Island surrendered. But the liberation of the Danish Island of Bornholm still lay ahead.

On May 5, the Baltic Fleet command warned the island's population of the forthcoming air attacks on Nazi ships and vessels and called upon the inhabitants to leave the ports of Rønne and Neksø and take to the forest. After that these ports were air-bombed, and on May 8, the Soviet Command delivered a demand for surrender to the commander of the island garrison.

That same day an order was received from the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Admiral of the Fleet N.G. Kuznetsov to end all naval combat actions as of May 9. At the same time, orders were given for the ports of Libava, Vindava, Hel and the Island of Bornholm to be occupied by specially detached groups of ships with the necessary complement of marines; to accept the surrender of all army units expressing their wish to do so, disarm them, and place under guard all vessels, equipment and arms; and to regard any resistance as non-compliance with the terms of surrender and immediately crush it by force.

The order was passed on at once to all units of the fleet.

In the evening our radio stations began to transmit a message to the crews of all German warships, transport ships and auxiliary vessels demanding their surrender. Simultaneously, a detachment of torpedo boats under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union A.G. Sverdlov was sent out on reconnaissance to the approaches of the port of Rønne on Bornholm Island. In addition, the detachment was to specify the nature of navigational barriers blocking entrance to the port.

The command of the garrison on Bornholm refused to surrender and it remained for us to crush its resistance.

The honour of carrying out the final Baltic landing operation of the war fell to an Order of the Red Banner unit of torpedo boats. The operation took place early in the morning on May 9 under the general command of naval base chief of staff, Captain D.S. Shavtsov. The flotilla of torpedo boats carrying the landing force was led to Bornholm by Commander E.V. Osetsky.

An air force unit from the Kolberg group took to the skies and also headed for Bornholm, ready to come to the aid of the landing force should the necessity arise.

On route the flotilla captured a small enemy convoy and had it escorted to Kolberg. Another larger convoy, which refused to surrender, was destroyed by our pilots. Because of the fog, the torpedo boats didn't enter the port of Rønne until midday. They put ashore the landing company, which

immediately took up a defensive position in the western sector of the port. Here, "guests" soon began to call. First came a Nazi officer, who proposed that we "leave the port". Observing, however, that our aircraft had appeared over the island, he beat a hasty retreat. Next to appear in the port was the governor of Bornholm Island and an accompanying interpreter. He barely had a chance to inform us that there were approximately 11,000 soldiers making up the German corps on Bornholm, when a car pulled up with an officer—an envoy from the headquarters of that corps. In the name of his commanding officers he invited the officer in charge of the landing force to come to headquarters for negotiations. In response to this he was told that Nazi Germany had surrendered and that the senior Soviet officer of the landing force was requesting the corps' commander and chief-of-staff, as well as the senior naval officer, to arrive at once to the port of Rønne.

Following long talks, the above-mentioned persons came to the port and soon afterward the entire island garrison surrendered. The next day the flotilla of torpedo boats under the command of Hero of the Soviet Union V.M. Starostin and his second-in-command Hero of the Soviet Union A.I. Afanasyev brought a Soviet army unit to Bornholm from Kolberg to take charge of the prisoners of war and armaments.

ALEXANDER TVARDOVSKY

Vassili Tyorkin

(An Excerpt)

THE ROAD TO BERLIN

All along the motorway,
Feathers flying, thick and grey.

Sticking to the telegraph cables
And the boughs of dripping limes,
Forming on the sides of lorries
Like a coat of winter rime.

Wheels of guns and kitchens grinding,
Mud and snow with feathers blending...
Rain and sleet all mixed with fluff,
Greatcoats smothered in the stuff...

Foreign clime so miserable,
Redbrick land interminable;
But war's old familiar sound
Makes the earth, as usual, tremble,
And the brittle roof-tiles tumble
Crashing to the sodden ground...

Mother Russia, at your wheels we've
Trudged across a hemisphere,
And we've left your mighty rolling
Rivers far behind somewhere.

Following the transport convoys
Trailed your birch-trees, gleaming white,
Deep into this alien country,
Dwindling until lost from sight.

© Alexander Tvardovsky, *Selected Poetry*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1981, pp. 212-215.

Alexander Tvardovsky (1910-1971)—Soviet poet and public figure, Lenin and State Prizes winner. During the whole of the war he worked as a front-line correspondent for the national press. In his lyrical verse and his poem *Vassili Tyorkin* (1941-1945), Tvardovsky writes a poetic chronicle of the exploit of the Soviet people, creating an epic image of the Russian soldier.

Tvardovsky is also the author of the poems *The Country of Muravia* (1936), *House by the Roadside* (1946), *Horizon Beyond the Horizon* (1953-1960), *By Right of Memory*, the book *From the Lyrics of Those Years. 1953-1967*, prose and articles of literary criticism.

The extract from the poem *Vassili Tyorkin* printed below is taken from the chapter "On the Road to Berlin".

Far away now, with your Volga
And the Kremlin's ancient towers,
You are separated from us
By three languages not ours.

It's no Russian day, late dawning
On this land that never smiles.
By the wall, steeped in a puddle
Lie the brittle, shattered tiles.

Warning notices, inscriptions,
Arrows, signposts everywhere;
Chicken netting, prohibitions,
Fences, cages, doors, restrictions—
All conducive to despair.

Motherland, in days of triumph
Or in times of trouble dire,
None's more bright, more fair than you are,
Nearer to the heart's desire.

There's no telling what the soldier's
Destiny will lead him to:
Even if a grave fraternal,
Let it be at least with you.

But still better—to arrive
All in one piece and alive,
Saying on his safe return:
"Greetings, land where I was born!"

And your soldier, people's servant,
May report, conscience at ease,
That he's had four years' campaigning,
Hardly grumbling or complaining,
And he wants to live in peace.

To the glory of your colours
He has rendered honour due.
Who, then, has more right than he has
To bestow his love on you?

Days and nights in battle spending,
Hat on head for weeks unending,
Your defender, warrior son,
Has been hurrying to greet you
Down the long road to Berlin...

All along that road fly swirling
Clouds of feathers, dancing, whirling.
And the rubble in each town
Reeks of burning fluff and down.

Eastward, while the big guns boom,
Out of dismal murk and gloom
As from Hell's gates, people crowd
Streaming down along the road.

Of all races and extractions,
Grimy, driven to distraction,
Bitter, burdened, and on foot,
Heading east—their only route.

Heading east, through soot and smoke-clouds,
From one prison dungeon fled.
Europe is dispersing homewards.
Storm of feathers overhead.

Brother Briton, Brother Frenchman,
Brother Pole, and all the rest
Seem to look towards the Russian
Almost as if with contrition,
But in open friendliness.

Brief encounter at some crossroads—
No one knows exactly where—
And the girls, though shy of speaking,
Lift their hands to pat their hair.

At each friendly word of greeting,
Our boy blushes like a rose.
This is Europe, but *spasibo*
Is a word all Europe knows.

There he stands, the liberator,
Hat, with star, somewhat askew:
"Glad to help in times of trouble,
Glad to lend a hand to you..."

1941-1945

VSEVOLOD VISHNEVSKY

Street Fighting in Danzig

There's been a sharp change in the weather the last few days. The sun is shining with all the splendour and generosity of spring. The dust swirls up on the roads and the men already go about in just their field shirts. The lakes are a deep blue and mirror-calm, reflecting the forests of pine. The war has rolled headlong throughout these territories; it has broken the wires and toppled the age-old trees along the main Danzig highways, it has burned the villages where the German 2nd Army has tried to put up defence. The smell of burning still fills the air and the smoldering landscape dies to a black charred ruin. The fields are furrowed with the caterpillar tracks of tanks, but the sun is shining and a clean sea breeze carries away the German ashes...

We pass by the waterworks which supplies Danzig. It has been closed down and will only be reopened on the day the town is taken. All the machinery and pumps are in good working order and our specialists are standing by.

Beyond the rust-coloured hills, impenetrable black clouds of smoke rise to a thousand, a thousand and a half metres. This is Danzig burning—from the very flood plains of the Vistula to Oliwa and Zoppot. Our artillery fires methodically on the centres of resistance in town, on the military depots and munitions factories... Yesterday the Germans tried to withdraw some of their men and supplies across the Vistula on ferry-boats. Ninety of our bombers flew overhead and destroyed these ferries... We are on a direct highway leading from the south to the centre of Danzig. The signposts mark off the distance: "Danzig—8 kilometres", "Danzig—6 kilometres". We overtake a military supply column. We drive past a signpost reading "Danzig—4 kilometres" and in a short while turn off to the left—towards the observation posts. There are no further signposts. Here, the battle is raging. Colossal plumes of black smoke rise to the sky, higher

Vsevolod Vishnevsky (1900-1951)—Soviet playwright, prose writer, journalist, State Prize winner. He took part in the defence of Leningrad, and during the war worked as a front-line correspondent for the national press.

Vishnevsky is the author of the plays *First Cavalry Army* (1929) and *An Optimistic Tragedy* (1933), the film script for *We are from Kronstadt* (1933), and the novel *We—the Russian People* (1947).

and higher... We climb to the crest of the dried hills and from here we can see all of Danzig... Flying low, our attack aircraft cover the hills, the forests and the outskirts of town with a menacing, whining buzz... Another 200, 300 metres... The batteries roar from left and right and the dust hangs in the air after each volley. The town is raked by gunfire coming from all sides of the encirclement.

Another ten steps and Danzig is before us, or more precisely, right under our feet. Signal rockets from our infantry flare, marking the forward line. These are signals for our attack aircraft. A message is heard over the radio: "Come in, come in—we're taking block 378... I repeat, we're taking block 378." I note the time—7:00 a.m. March 26. The infantry from one of the units that won its glory in the battles for Leningrad and Volkhov bursts into Danzig. They are led by Captains Potomsky and Kozin. And there before them are the first of the town's buildings...

Breaches, rising dust, clouds of smoke. Guards tanks smash through fences and walls... The plain, identical houses, the first church... The political centre of Danzig—the Senate building, Parliament and the fortress Hagelsberg—is but a kilometre and a half away, directly along this street.

We talk things over with the officers... Guards Colonel Vassili Chesnokov says: "Our men are trained for night fighting. The Germans don't like it and don't understand it. At night the Germans mainly shoot off rockets and fire frequently at random. But we strike quickly and unexpectedly... By 3:00 a.m. we'd already reached the outskirts. The first was battalion commander Captain Kozin, a Party member, holder of Orders... We don't have a single officer who hasn't been decorated. And our men know the town. We've got maps showing all the streets, every administrative, economic and other centres." Chesnokov speaks over the radio phone: "Hello, I'm listening... You've taken it?... Shoot by direct laying."

The attack aircraft once again pass over the hills... Black shell bursts from German anti-aircraft guns. The bright flash of explosions. The earth shudders, bombs are dropped. Up ahead hangs a whitish-grey curtain of smoke, the pilots are clearing the way for the infantry.

The Germans, as can be seen and heard, are putting up a fanatic resistance. Faustniks[1] lie in wait, trying to let our tanks get as close as 30-40 metres. Our infantry responds to this by combing all windows, basements and garrets. Protecting our tanks, submachine-gunners move in front of them at 100-150 metres. The advanced battal-

ion has come to within 15 metres of the German lines.

The Germans counterattack, urged forward by their officers... "What else could we do, we couldn't turn back," the captives try to justify themselves. Here are the first two taken prisoner, Private Heinrich Ruckel of the 12th Air and Field Division and Non-Commissioned Officer of the Volkssturm[2] Hermann Mundtke. "Besides us, there's a police battalion here now."

The Germans surrounded in Danzig are in an unenviable position. The German command stupidly and stubbornly order their soldiers to "Stand or die." The streets are blocked off by SS and police punitive squads. They shoot anyone who hangs back... Yesterday a German unit raised the white flag and the punitive squads opened fire on them; out of 250 trying to surrender, only 35 came out alive...

The breakthrough by our troops storming Danzig is worth all the praises... In one of the last attacks, Lieutenant Vassili Ivanov, with submachine-gun in hand, burst right through to the Germans, calling on them with gestures to lay down their arms and give themselves up. The senior officers noted: "One rarely sees such daring actions, such resoluteness. He stirred the whole company to action; the Germans were struck dumb, overrun."

However, one shouldn't conclude that the Germans are "already done away with". They are losing strength and nearing a collapse, but there are still many instances of fierce fighting and resistance... A young officer taken prisoner. It is written on his face that he has decided to be stubborn and that everything is completely clear to him: "You want to know how the war will end? Somewhere a decisive battle is about to take place in which the Russians, Americans and British will be defeated. We have a new weapon. We will take the offensive—that's how it was with the Russians in 1941... The last battalion in this war will be German, we will win."

He stands there, young and dull, fanatically repeating all this nonsense. Where do such types come from? From German schools. One of them is located just a kilometre from here. This is a privileged school for selected Aryans, the Danzig-Henkau castle of the National Socialist Party. A large three-storey building. In the vestibule are black marble slabs on which various "maxims" are written. Auditoriums, a movie hall and, most important, a library. And what books it holds: *One Hundred Hitler's Theses on Danzig, The Germans in the East, The Germans on the Volga, German Danzig, German Campaign to Poland,*

The Germans and Ailing Europe. In short, there is nothing in the world except Germans... And here before you stands just such an Aryan oaf, who could neither hold the line nor save his subordinates, who didn't have the courage to shoot himself and yet stands there talking about the "last battalion" which, somewhere, is going to defeat the USSR, the USA and Britain.

"Get this prisoner out of here!"

We pass by a large German anti-tank ditch, dug not long ago by hundreds of Danzig citizens. Our tanks passed over it as if on exercise... The sun is positively burning today... Our troops have already managed to put up bright boards along the road: "Finish off the Enemy in His Den", "Let not a Single German Escape the Cauldron", "Forward to Danzig". Nowhere are these boards and posters more expressive, more concrete than here, in the thick of the battle. Nowhere is a warm, human word more valuable than here. Nowhere is a letter from loved ones, from the Motherland, more appreciated... And here are the people coming with the mail, right up to the forward lines. And here and now, in the afternoon of March 26, on the streets of Danzig the men are reading a letter—the response of the Grebenshchikov family, Alexei and Agafya, to the company commander's praise of their son Pyotr... "Please accept parents' thanks and gratitude, Comrade Commander, for your warm letter... We are pleased to know that our son Pyotr is a worthy defender of the Motherland, and we hope he will live up to the decoration awarded him. We send him our parental instructions to serve his country honourably and to carry out all his commander's orders implicitly." A warm word from dear Russia, a loving kindness and concern amidst this black smoke and scorched hell. Oh how good it is!... Your letter, dear Grebenshchikovs, came at just the time when it was needed most, and thousands of soldiers read it. And thousands of soldiers rose again and again and went forward... Another 50 metres, another 100 metres...

Tiles, glass and plaster come crashing down amidst the smoke. Wounded Ivan Shpakovsky makes it through to a fence, clambers over and throws two grenades into a house. The German machine-gun falls silent... Another 50 metres have been taken... The Germans make an all-out counter-attack on the Guards' observation post. The signallers and medics take up arms. The unit commander jokingly says, "Okay, 'troops', let them get closer." And the counter-attackers are cut down by gunfire. Wounded Germans scream and crawl back. The dead lay all around, arms outflung...

The sinister smoke continues to hang over the town. The siege shatters the nerves of the Germans. These are not the men of Leningrad, of Stalingrad or Sevastopol; although Goebbels shouted and tried his best to persuade everyone that the Germans know the experience of these cities and will "apply it to the full". No, it won't turn out that way; they aren't made of the same stuff, they haven't had that kind of upbringing... Seeping out of every hole and slit trench, the residents of Danzig make their way out of town by the thousands and head for the Russian lines. "Oh, it's impossible to endure," they say about the siege. They come, drenched in sweat, eyes darting from side to side, carrying duffel bags, knapsacks and suitcases. They "dissociate" themselves from everything; they curse Hitler and mock him, looking obsequiously into our eyes, shaking and nodding their heads in agreement.

In a frenzied fury, *Das Schwarze Korps* curses such Germans. The SS newspaper shouts itself hoarse about how all these Germans voted for Hitler, supported his programmes and stood by his side; that now they won't succeed in claiming to be innocent sheep, that they "all should share responsibility". A typical article...

At night, our assault groups penetrate further and further into the town. The lightening of artillery blazes incessantly. Our air force literally hangs overhead. During the dive bombing, the bluish-green spurts of shells and tracer bullets show up clearly in the dark. The glow of fires decorates the sky... Out of the night moon-lit haze, the German cruisers and destroyers continue to fire. They are tearing Zoppot to pieces—"if we can't have it, then neither shall you". That is the only explanation there can be for this pointless shelling, which cannot possibly halt the general storming of Danzig, even for an hour.

The left flank reports on a strong push forward by our neighbouring units. The wedges formed by our assault troops pierce the town from four directions. The Germans give up one line after another. They've lost the last airfield. They've lost the entire western sector of barracks. Our advanced units have already made it to the Vistula, to that sector in which all the petroleum stores for the port are kept and where the world renowned shipyards Schichau is located. The scouts and assault groups now force a crossing over the Vistula and come out on the marshy flood plains. On the last roads along the shore, bunching together and running into one another, German transports and vehicles push their way towards a narrow seaside spit... Where are they heading? To Pillau and Königsberg. Out

of the frying-pan into the fire... And in the outer roadsteads the ships of Admiral Doenitz maliciously cruise back and forth. There is nothing left for them but to bid farewell to Danzig's naval base. Up the masts, both in the port and at the naval base of Danzig, our flag is hoisted!

The night still fights off the dawn... The people up at the observation post haven't slept since the storming of Danzig began... "The Germans are in chaos, look for yourself. Don't sleep, understand? It's a matter of honour to break through. Can you see your sector? Take the map. Move the markers to the left—up to the red markers... Such a situation doesn't occur very often. You should take hold of it, understand?... I'm not reproaching you, we're through the worst of it... Push on—more daring, don't spare the ammunition, we've got enough. Shoot from the *DShK's*[3], clear them out... That's it for me. See you soon. Yes, I'm moving headquarters into town. Get the tea ready, I'm on my way..."

The men's faces are exhausted, but still they have some kind of amazing, all-conquering energy.

"Will we take the fortress, the building of the Gauleiter, their headquarters today?"

"We should be able to."

Heavy tanks are pushing towards the centre... The red pencil marks a new sharp line on the map of Danzig.

March 27, 1945

YURI BONDAREV

The Shore

(An Excerpt)

In all probability it was a German detachment of some kind that had been destroyed and had retreated into the forest, evidently with the aim either of getting through to Berlin or of breaking out to the West, but one thing was not clear: why had the Germans revealed their presence, not at night, but in the morning by opening fire with stupid decisiveness upon the Soviet column of Studebakers on the highway? Perhaps this was the final piece of savagery before destruction, perhaps, through an open attack on the trucks, some tank detachment commander bereft of a measure of hope wanted by taking a reckless risk to find out who and what type of troops were stationed in the small town on the rim of surrounded and defeated Berlin.

Nikitin had scarcely given the order "Limber the guns" than he saw soldiers running towards the guns and the acute feeling of the nearby breath of danger obscured everything. Because there was no front line and random battle was so inevitable, icy needles pricked his entire body, as they had when the battery had come unawares upon minefields at night.

This feeling mastered him until they were waiting with unusual nervousness at the firing position for the appearance of a vehicle, seeing beyond the obstacle wall of explosions four heavy self-propelled guns on the highway and two armoured carriers in a meadow moving up slowly outside the zone of fire of the neighbouring batteries; until the guns had been hitched to trucks and turned round over the garden and through the field on to the street, which was engulfed by a multitude of voices shouting battle orders and the roar of engines and seething with soldiers; until, after halting in traffic jams at crossroads, they came out at last on the eastern outskirts, to which the highway from the forest led.

• Yuri Bondarev, *The Shore*, Raduga Publishers, Moscow, 1984, pp. 219-256.

There they stopped again. Ahead, enveloped in smoke, anti-tank guns dug into the apple orchards of the last houses emitted double thumps, bitingly and often; to the left low, nimble Dodges trailing field guns turned out of the yards into the street and dashed at an acute angle to the highway along side tracks in order to detour round the self-propelled guns; carts and field kitchens, rattling, rushed back to the town centre, blocking the way to the torrent of traffic moving in the opposite direction; infantry jumped on to the road from trucks and ran in line towards the lake, where shells were bursting; an elderly, grim-faced lieutenant-colonel, evidently from headquarters, ran towards the battery's column, held up by a traffic jam, his face growing pale, and banged with the butt of his pistol on the wing of the truck belonging to the first field gun, in which Knyazhko was driving, shouted something and pointed with his pistol at the forest; Knyazhko half-opened the door of the cab, listened to what he said, nodded and signalled to Nikitin: forward!

The chaos of moving from one position to another, the fuss, the confusion on the eastern outskirts, the running fire of anti-tank guns, the shouted orders, the instructions of sergeants, resourceful in such situations, the clatter of field kitchen wheels moving off, the faces, surprised, cheerful and uncomprehending, of the soldiers—all this nervous tension, incomprehension and general excitement, familiar to Nikitin from the past years, did not conceal from him a certain logic: after Berlin and the untroubled days of relaxation no one had anticipated—could not even anticipate—an attack from the Germans in the rear, while at the same time no one had thought about defence, either, and no one had dug trenches by the houses on the edge of town. Knyazhko's signalled "forward", the dash towards the lake by the infantry and the rush along the cart track by the Dodges of the anti-tank artillery, skirting the self-propelled guns, made it clear to Nikitin that the battle would take place not in the town but there, beyond its outskirts, on that open field, cut through by the highway, towards which both the anti-tank guns hitched to the Dodges and their battery were directly moving.

But a few minutes later Nikitin realised that he had been mistaken. The battery of anti-tank guns, throwing up clouds of dust along the cart track, was moving rapidly farther and farther to the right at an acute angle to the highway, while to the left the infantry was moving across towards the lake in a series of spurts. Nikitin, already moving straight along the highway behind Knyazhko's

platoon towards the self-propelled guns, was calculating, according to his custom, that in about three kilometres they would have to turn off into a field and swing the guns round. Through scraps of smoke he saw the first field gun rolling along on its trailer, the sun slipping and bouncing on its long barrel, which had been as highly polished with fuel oil during the previous days as if they had been preparing for an inspection, saw dimly ahead the nearest self-propelled gun, its vague and clumsy bulk and the sharp flashes as it fired behind the brown palisade of explosions. "Now we shall approach, guns 'at battle readiness' and the trucks will go back into cover, now it will all happen, here, here in this field!" The same thought kept whirling in Nikitin's mind, the same mechanical commands before the last kilometre of the approach to point-blank range. As always mentally calculating this distance, which would now be wavering fatally on the razor's edge of black and red, picturing to himself in advance the lack of cover of their guns, left by the trucks amid the open field under the sharp-eyed alien gun-sights, he felt, as he always did, a dull access of bitterness at the thought that, probably, not everyone would return from this field...

"We're as lucky as drowned men, lieutenant," Mezhenin's voice reached Nikitin's ear. Mezhenin was sitting beside him in the cab. His voice was interrupted by the roar of the engine and the rattling of the truck; his gaze, hard, seeming ready to spring and fixed on the highway, was also unfamiliar to Nikitin. "In a direct line all the time... Are they moving away, then?" he shouted again, narrowing his eyes, as if smoke and the scorching wind penetrating the windscreen were lashing his eyes. "Look at the self-propelled guns, lieutenant!"

What about the guns? Where can you see them moving away?"

The acid yellow murk, illuminated by the sun, was becoming thicker over the entire field, not dispersing; it had accumulated, rent by the return fire, and on the highway through gaps in the smoke the blurred outlines of the self-propelled guns appeared, swaying and melting. It was impossible now to determine whether they were advancing, standing still or moving away.

At that moment Nikitin felt from their speed and the time that the trucks should now have covered the three or four kilometres necessary to come within the range of the self-propelled guns. They had reached the distance for point-blank firing and it was now time to begin the battle,

to open fire. However, the leading vehicle, Knyazhko's, continued to race forward without slackening speed, and this circumstance alone at first seemed to Nikitin some kind of aberration, a piece of madness on the part of the first platoon (advancing under direct fire without bringing the guns into battle-ready positions!). However, having known Knyazhko for two long years, he soon regained faith even now in the risk he was taking and in his cool calculation, and therefore a strange hope flowed into Nikitin's breast in a sharp, hot stream: the battle would end sooner than he thought. Were the self-propelled guns really moving away?

The self-propelled guns were indeed reversing towards the forest, towards the fringe from where they had emerged, backing along the highway and firing defensive volleys. Then the nearest gun turned round clumsily, its spotted grey armour dully sliding through the sunlight, belched prickly trails of sparks from its exhaust pipes and crawled backwards. Immediately, in the turbid gloom flowing along the highway, the three self-propelled guns following it began to swing round heavily and ponderously and pull back in line towards the edge of the forest. Nikitin saw this clearly now and just as clearly saw the two armoured carriers, which had delayed their attack on the lake shore, where the figures of Soviet infantrymen were bobbing up and down. The armoured carriers began to roll back towards the forest, loosing thick, sparkling streams of heavy-calibre machine-gun fire at these figures.

The Germans, having spearheaded the attack on the town, were retreating into the forest, but the momentary hope Nikitin had felt for a swift outcome to the battle was a delusion and there was to be no relief.

When they were still some two hundred metres from the forester's house, rolling the guns along the half-overgrown woodland track accompanied by the shouts and jostling of the infantrymen, who were in excited high spirits at the help from the artillery, Nikitin guessed at and felt from the sounds of intensified firing beyond the trees—from the bass rumble of a heavy machine gun, the piercing bark of German automatic pistols, the crackling response of Soviet fire, the singing of spent bullets in the thicket and the snapping as they ricocheted off the chipped trunks—the inevitable reality of the nearby battle towards which they were moving and the feeling of

ill-will in his heart towards this infantry senior lieutenant, flat-nosed, crooked-legged, superstitiously refusing to relinquish his tattered, bullet-pierced groundsheet, became increasingly malicious and importunate. The senior lieutenant, a rascal and an impudent loudmouth, had imagined from first appearances that the battery had cunningly left the battle and in good time, that it was sitting it out on one side, taking a prudent rest, getting its fill of the sun, while his infantry, which was now being killed, was carrying out its fatal duty without the support of fire or assistance from the artillery.

"An unpleasant fellow," Nikitin thought bitterly. "And what a repulsive broad nose he has, as if it had been broken."

They walked quickly ahead of the guns, Perlin, Knyazhko and Nikitin, the old groundsheet of the senior lieutenant, faded to a dirty grey, billowing out, its skirts dangling. His infantryman's voice, well honed by orders and interrupted by an excited laugh, was irritating.

"We'll give them a hot time now, we'll make them hop! With four guns they'll be smoked out like bedbugs. And then—we attack! Why, I was running around the position and thinking we'd be stuck here until the second coming! Racking your brains, then you take a look—and there you are! Well, I thought, if there's no god, there is a god of war! Ha, ha! ("Why does he talk so much?" Nikitin thought. "Is he justifying himself?") I'll try, I say, to pray to this god. My two platoons are blockading the house now. Achtung, boys! We'll do it by easy stages now. The house is less than spitting distance from here..."

"Halt!" Knyazhko gave the order to the gun crews; he had not once engaged in conversation with Perlin. "Wait here. Come on! Show us what you have here," he ordered Perlin. "Where are the company's positions? You go ahead."

For a few metres they continued to walk upright along the exposed path, but scarcely had they turned left into the stifling shade of the pines after Perlin than the sharp squeals of the firing that reached there, the patter of bullets against the trunks and the conifer twigs that were torn off and fell from above made them bend instinctively and look towards where Perlin was leading them, pushing with his "enchanted" groundsheet between the young firs towards the tangled chaos of firing beyond the trees.

There, after only one hundred metres, they stumbled on the body of a dead German, sprawling in a greenish hummock by the great, knotty roots of an enormous pine.

He lay very awkwardly in his new green uniform, twisted on his side as if frozen for ever in the agony of flight, one leg drawn up to his stomach, the other, in a dusty, unworn boot, stretched out, the young boyish face overlaid with the yellowness of a corpse, right temple pressed against bloodied fingers that were bunched, cup-like; his face was distorted by a petrified grimace of terror, his mouth frozen wide open in a yell for help before death, but his flaxen hair, overgrown and as fine as a girl's, still lived, shining in the shafts of sunlight inclined through the branches, seeming with its unvanished gleam to deceive his own death, which he had met there. Ants moved like brown dots over his dead face, swarming busily in his lashes, drinking the last moisture, crawling over his motionless lips into his open mouth. He had been dead for an hour or an hour and a half, Nikitin thought.

"What was this child doing here?" Knyazhko asked, frowning, and jerked his head at Perlin. "Have a look at his papers. Who was he? A member of the Hitler Youth? Or a werewolf? He must have been about sixteen..."

"What's the difference, lieutenant, whether he was sixteen or not, what's it to you?" Perlin responded, spitting juicily near the German's feet. "They were retreating here from the edge of the forest, towards the forester's house. There's more than one of them lying about the woods. What does it matter to you? A waste of time and effort..."

However, he squatted on his heels and turned out all the dead man's pockets one after the other with a demonstrative disgust. But there were no papers apart from the superfluous and almost useless trifles old soldiers do not carry: a small, needlessly elegant pen-knife, a tarnished badge on which a dagger and swastika were represented, a ramrod chain, a tiny Browning pistol, broken, without a trigger, a red pencil with a chewed cap, a packet of opened, crumbled biscuits; there was neither wallet nor photographs. Evidently, nothing yet had given this dead boy firm roots—neither love, nor the past, nor vices. He seemed to have liked shiny metal objects as, no doubt, he had liked to hold an automatic pistol in his hands, obediently ready to flash fire like a mechanical toy. Nikitin imagined this lusting passion for the metal of the gun in terms of himself and others and his own feeling of love for the pistol he had first received on the day he had graduated from military college. "He has only recently left school," he thought.

"A boy," Knyazhko said with pensive vagueness. "Where is he from, I wonder? From the town? What do you think, Nikitin?"

"Perhaps."

"The nazi whelp has snuffed it, but he has some unimaginable junk in his pockets," Perlin said and tossed the useless trinkets he had been holding on to the German's corpse. "The tiddler hasn't even got a watch."

"Well, but your're a crude fellow, senior lieutenant," Knyazhko said and his eyes flashed angrily as he hurried Perlin on. "Forward, then! Lead us up to your company's positions, senior lieutenant!"

Nikitin was silent. He did not like to linger over the dead, to scrutinise their poses, which were sometimes monstrously uncomfortable and unlovely, marked by eternally frozen torment or by the last struggle for life. He could not bear to examine their faces, distorted by surprise in the face of death before sufferings that were ended, eyes, glassily protruding, stony smiles apparently directed at the living, or sometimes soothed by the rational despair of a chosen limit which had lured them into a terrible but barren nothingness, where there was no firing any more. Nikitin could not endure the boastful assertions that it was not difficult to become accustomed to this: the sight of another's death reminded him warningly of the unprotected fragility of his own existence in the war and mercilessly narrowed the circle of probability which was without limit only once in the war—during the first battle.

"It was the first battle for this German," Nikitin thought, striding beside Knyazhko as they followed Perlin. "He understood what life was and what war was when he ran from the edge of the forest under our bullets. No doubt he had no automatic pistol then. He was running away from death and he threw away his gun, like an unnecessary toy. And yet, why am I thinking about this?"

The closer they approached the fire lashing ahead and the iron buzzing of the machine-gun wind, the more piercingly their ears were struck by the whistle of automatic bursts, the colder and sicker at heart did Nikitin feel. For the thousandth time, underpinned only by faith in his luck, he was obliged to wrestle with himself there, beyond "either-or", where the sharpened axe of fatal chance held hateful and omnipotent sway. After the battle that had been broken off with the self-propelled guns the feeling of drawing close to danger was especially unpleasant and in order to suppress this new feeling of chilling cold in his chest he looked at Knyazhko, trying to guess whether he was now

experiencing something similar, humiliating and loathsome, like the feeling of unrelieved nausea.

But Knyazhko walked on, his boots touching the ground lightly, stepping over the big roots of the pines, his brows drawn together with concern. It was impossible to say what he was thinking about now.

"Here! Artillerymen, halt!" Perlin ordered suddenly, stopping in a thicket. "Look ahead! You can see everything from the bushes here! It's here that the guns should be placed. That's where they've holed up! The armoured carrier is on the other side of the barn. To the left of the house."

"I must request you not to point out to us how and where to position the guns," Knyazhko said dryly. "We shall work it out for ourselves. Is your command post far?"

"It was just by here. Come this way, lieutenant, to the other side of the wood pile. My second-in-command remained there. Although it's all the same here, you can get shot up anywhere," Perlin responded.

And, calling someone, he bent down and walked another ten steps to the right of the bushes, towards a low pile of neatly stacked timber from which the figure of a very young junior lieutenant popped up to meet them as if from out of the ground. A youthful face with protruding ears darting about there and a voice that began to speak very fast said:

"Have you returned, comrade senior lieutenant? But who are they?"

"Calm down, Lavrentiev!" Perlin said roughly. "Say a prayer: I've brought some artillerymen. Will you all lie about as if this was a beach, you double-dyed holiday-markers, while uncle attacks?"

"You just see what they are doing!" Lavrentiev cried in a shrill voice, which was certainly not that of an infantryman, and it was not difficult for Nikitin to tell from the junior lieutenant's new belt and unbuttoned and unscratched holster that he had not been at the front long.

It was risky to linger even for a minute there, some two hundred metres from the forester's house, by the farthermost pines. The edge of the forest was interlaced with fire, bullets rang against the trunks like flocks of woodpeckers and all three men were obliged to go behind the wood pile, moving under cover, to observe from there: that was safer to some extent.

Lavrentiev, offended, no doubt, by Perlin's blunt reproof in the presence of the artillerymen, continued to stand by the stack of logs, shaking off the pine needles stuck to his field shirt in an independent way.

"There's the snag, boys! Can you see the house clearly?" Perlin said, the reddish whites of his black eyes roving over the area, and barked unexpectedly at Lavrentiev: "You, cut out the funny business and get your ass in here, you lop-eared hero!"

Indeed, the position ahead had that lack of ambiguity which Nikitin, with a feeling of hostility towards Perlin and towards his company, had expected. The clear-cut situation of the rifle company, halted there by the Germans, consisted not in the infantry's perplexed inactivity but in this well-built, two-storied house now clearly visible beyond the trees, surrounded by wooden outhouses in the middle of a broad meadow. There was something disorderly and fevered, as there had been during the recent clash with the self-propelled guns, as if the ceaseless blind fire of the Germans was the last savagery of men doomed to death. The infantry were lying low under the farthermost pines, not rising, not running across or showing themselves in exposed places, while the Germans were firing without a break at the forest and at every metre of the meadow: the entire house, from the smashed windows on the ground floor to the attic, pulsated with bursts of automatic fire, teeth bared, and the armoured carrier, half concealed by the corner of the left outhouse, which was giving support to the defence of the house with heavy machine-gun fire, jerkily belched rumbling white dotted lines at intervals along the lower part of the pines around the meadow, where the crawling figures of infantrymen could be seen.

"This is how we'll do it, lads... As soon as you give the fritzes a good belt, I'll raise the lads with a Very signal," Perlin said, wiping the sweat from his broad, weather-beaten face with the groundsheet. "The signal to attack will be a red light. That's so you don't shoot my boys somehow or other."

"They certainly won't engage in hand-to-hand fighting" Lavrentiev observed and interrupted the unmanly squeakiness of his voice by a deep cough, pulling a brand-new pistol from his holster with grim militancy and demonstratively snapping out the magazine, thereby verifying that there were, indeed, present the bullets necessary for hand-to-hand fighting.

"Just look how frisky Lavrentiev is! Longing for a hand-to-hand fight!" Perlin snorted through his flat nose. "But do you know, my dear old friend, that in the entire war I've played the hero just once in a German trench, waving a rifle butt, and I was ripe for three months of mayor repairs immediately! What do you want a hand-to-hand fight for,

for God's sake, when there are machine-gun bullets—bayonets are for opening cans with. All right, you got mixed up in the conversation with out-of-place, childish babbling, devil take it!"

"I was saying what I think, comrade senior lieutenant," Lavrentiev mumbled, knitting his brows, and blew down the barrel of his pistol for some reason. "That's my opinion."

"What a splendid fellow," Nikitin thought.

"I see," Knyazhko said with a faint smile at Lavrentiev, whom he, too, evidently liked, and ordered Nikitin: "One gun and two cases of shells will be sufficient here. Let the others wait outside the firing zone."

"Are you sure that one gun will be enough?" Nikitin asked doubtfully. "Wouldn't it be better all the same to bring the entire platoon into line?"

But Knyazhko interrupted him:

"I am absolutely sure. We are not firing at tanks. Bring up Mezhenin's gun. The position here isn't bad. To the left of the wood pile. Bring the gun up by the route we followed here."

"Understood."

"Why is he so calm and so sure that the infantry can be supported by one gun and two cases of shells?" Nikitin thought. "Isn't he underestimating something? Does he think it's all going to be simple?"

When, some fifteen minutes later, Nikitin brought up the gun by the same route through the forest with the help of the infantry platoon, Knyazhko was pacing back and forth over the rusty needles near the wood pile, lashing his knee with a twig and occasionally glancing upwards, where flocks of bullets rang, sang, ricocheted and splintered the bark of the pines. As soon as Nikitin appeared he drew a leisurely circle on the ground with the twig and ordered:

"Put the gun here, there's no better position. The armoured carrier and the house are in the zone of fire. Prepare the gun for firing!"

"Prepare the gun for firing!" Nikitin shouted. He saw the gun crew go into action behind the cover of the shield, pulling the side plates apart and pressing the trail spades into the sand with the weight of their bodies, and immediately gave another order: "Dig the trail spades in! As far as they'll go! Mezhenin, make sure the gun is sitting firmly! Precision! Precision!"

Mezhenin, face rigid, seeming not to grasp the orders, moved from behind the shield of the gun, swept his fluttering lashes over the meadow and over the buildings of the

forester's house, which were clearly visible, and suddenly yelled, blanketing the voices of the gun crew:

"Dig in the trail spades! Damn your eyes!"

And bending, his chest looming over the gun-layer Tatkin, who was crawling on his knees by the sights, he pressed down on his puny shoulder so that Tatkin's red head jerked backwards with pain.

"What?" he cried and his brown moustaches, covering the defect of his cleft lip, exposed his small teeth.

"Now, then, clear off, book-keeper, goddamn you!" Mezhenin said hoarsely, jerking him up from his knees and shoving him back before squatting down heavily by the sight and thrusting his brow into the eyepiece.

"You, Mezhenin?" Nikitin said. He knew the greedy tenacity, the speed and accuracy of firing that Mezhenin, the former gun-layer, could command, but there was something inexplicable about his decision to set the sights himself.

No answer came and Nikitin said nothing more to him, his ear tuned now to Knyazhko's familiar, ringingly clear order, the syllables drawn out:

"At the car-rier..."

After the first shell he thought that sparks splashed from the grey hull of the armoured carrier, flaming prickles of fire, and the machine gun choked in mid-burst; thick smoke spiralled steeply above the outhouse and then something dark, recalling human bodies, began to pour over the side and two shadows darted in zig-zag spurts towards the house. The next moment Nikitin, having determined that it was a direct hit, gave the second order:

"To the right, zero zero four, at the corner of the house, fragmentation shell!"

The shell heaved into the breech end clanged briefly and Ushatikov's surprised cry could be heard: "Are they running for the house?" One of Mezhenin's shoulders rose clumsily, lingered, and descended smoothly as he pressed the trigger. Immediately the sergeant's neck and his plump spine were deflected backwards from the shot and the recoil of the gun and again Mezhenin glued his sweaty forehead to the eyepiece of the sight. But as he was thrown back Nikitin caught a sideways glimpse of his profile—the cruel fold of his twisted mouth and the wild expression of suppressed hatred and, seemingly, of intoxication.

The second explosion soared upwards, black and scarlet, two metres behind the dark figures, who fell, cut down, near the corner of the house, the wall of which was lashed by shrapnel and smoke. Thirstily licking his dry lips, Mezhenin was again absorbed by the gun-sights, hoarsely

uttering, not words that had sense, but dull, truncated sounds like those made when chopping wood. Nikitin was swept by a strange, powerful hope of a successful outcome to the battle at this identity of man and gun and the accurate shelling. Everything that had happened the previous day, driving them inimically apart, momentarily vanished, dissolved and was forgotten and forgiven by him and was, no doubt, forgotten by Mezhenin, who was intoxicated by the destructive excitement of the battle that had begun.

"Give the order, lieutenant, give the order!"

At that moment, as the second shell burst covered the two Germans amid the settling powdery murk by the corner of the house behind the armoured carrier, peacefulness suddenly settled on the meadow. The heavy machine gun choked. The automatic weapons fell silent; glass shattered and rang inside the buildings and now feeble cries, resembling hysterical weeping, could be heard from the smashed windows of the forester's house before they, too, fell silent.

"Stop! Cease fire. Not bad, Mezhenin!"

"No, it isn't me giving the orders, it's Knyazhko."

Knyazhko, restrained as usual, stood erect under a pine some ten paces to the left of the gun, slapping his knee with a twig. He was looking at the house with surprise, even with an attentive, fastidious pity—the way the impotence of an animal crushed on the road, trying to stand up, is observed.

"Why has he stopped firing? Why? We should fire at the windows now, at least one shell at the windows!" Nikitin thought, making out the faces of Perlin and the youthful Lavrentiev straining towards the gun by the wood pile.

"Wonderful, boys! Come on, my lads! Trump them, artillerymen! Bash them, the swine!" Perlin shouted, running up to Knyazhko in his billowing groundsheet, and waved a Very pistol in the direction of the house. "Give them some more! And then we shall attack, too! More shells, boys, you should let them have another couple, my dears..."

"Nikitin! Two shells, at the windows!" Knyazhko ordered, an angry wrinkle cutting across his forehead, and snapped in passing to Perlin: "I must request you not to interfere with the firing. And don't shout senselessly! Otherwise I shall cease firing."

"Give the order, lieutenant, give the order!" Mezhenin rasped, his eye remaining glued to the sights, and again his right shoulder rose in readiness with an imperceptibly soft, expectant slipping of his hand, which lay on the trigger: "Give the order, lieutenant!"

While not once tearing himself from the sights he was guessing with the most subtle, lightning swiftness, as if by instinct, the sequence of firing and was hurrying himself, Nikitin and the entire gun crew, which barely kept pace with his preparedness by the raising of his shoulder alone.

"At the windows! Two fragmentation shells!"

The explosions were not visible. The two shells burst inside the house, shaking it heavily and lifting it with a growing reverberation. Clouds of straw-coloured smoke poured from the ground floor windows and suddenly the terrible howl of human voices burst from there, merged into a single whole. It burst from the smoke-filled lower windows, a howl of despair and doom before death, then orders in German cut through this howl, there were solitary shots within the house and Nikitin, a shudder running down his spine, imagined what those two shells, fired by Mezhenin with accuracy of a sniper, had done.

"Give the order, lieutenant, give the order!" Mezhenin repeated crazily, irrepressibly, hoarsely emitting short, guttural sounds after each shot.

"Another two shells! Another! Give the order!"

The howling in the house had not ceased.

"What's the matter with them there?" A faint chill ran through the gun crew. "Crying, are they? Shouting, eh?"

Nikitin saw Knyazhko's pale face, twisted with suffering and surprise, as he plucked at the twig in his hands, the face, some distance away, of Junior Lieutenant Lavrentiev, eyes crewed up and hands pressed against his ears; saw Perlin, who was waving the Very pistol with a cry and even a laugh of malicious satisfaction, his groundsheet billowing out, his parade-ground voice striking the ear with coarse obscenities: "They're giving themselves up, the vipers, they're giving themselves up, goddamn them." And at that moment, glancing at the house, Nikitin glimpsed something white: a scrap of material fluttered at a window and was apparently cut off immediately by a dull shot fired by someone from inside. This piece of white flashed and disappeared, but the cry of voices joined by horror tore in a turbid wave from the windows, rising and falling, as happens during a fire in houses locked and engulfed by flames.

"The hell they're giving themselves up, the hell they are!" Mezhenin said jerkily and hoarsely, still glued to the sights. "They've taken down the white flag, they waved a handkerchief! Give the order, lieutenant, give the order! Another couple of shells in there! We'll make *shashlik* of them... We'll turn them into a pile of shit. Load, I say!"

"Stop! Not a single shell!" Knyazhko cried. He flung away the twig and approached Mezhenin, deathly pale, stubbornly concentrated, and spoke rapidly in a voice gripped by excitement. "Look... Those are unquestionably boys. Like that dead soldier... boys! They don't even know how to fight. It looks as if we are firing at them point-blank! They put out a white flag and removed it. Werewolves or Hitler Youth... They doubt that we'll spare them. They are afraid of being taken prisoner... Stop, don't fire!"

During two years of war, since Knyazhko had joined the battery on the Dnieper, Nikitin had never noticed a shadow or hint of doubt or indecision in him. What he was saying now was one facet of the truth or the whole truth, which Nikitin could have understood had indecisiveness been typical of Knyazhko, as an upright strength that made him a leader, combined, as it were, with slight condescension, were characteristic of him.

"What are you proposing?" Nikitin asked. "I don't understand... What?"

"Stop! No one is to fire! Infantry! Perlin! Not a single shot!" Knyazhko shouted, turning to Perlin, beside whom, like a thin column, Junior Lieutenant Lavrentiev swayed, his cheeks spotted red. "Listen, Perlin, not a single shot! They'll give themselves up anyway! Fire only when I give the order! Only when I give the order!"

After he had issued this command Knyazhko's countenance resumed its former appearance, except that his face did not lose its transparent pallor. He ran his hand over his belt in a familiar gesture, slightly straightened his cap on his forehead, frowned and walked straight from the gun to the furthermost pines, the last before the meadow, limping a little and for some reason pulling out his handkerchief. There, already clearly visible on the bright green of the grass, he resolutely raised the handkerchief above his head and waved it, shouting something in German—a few sentences, separated by pauses. Nikitin barely understood three words: "nicht schiessen" and "junge", but Knyazhko's action, uncontemplated and inspiring terror, his order not to continue the unequal battle with the Germans holed up in the house—that which had seemed to be one facet of the truth or the whole truth—was both a senseless risk and a way out of madness which Knyazhko, unable to stand the animal howl of the Germans caused by the two shots fired point-blank at the windows, wanted to end by that mad step of his sober intelligence.

"What is he doing? Where has he gone? Whe-ere to? Lieutenant!"

Perlin scorched Nikitin with his black eyes and darted with his square figure from one side of the gun; his boots crackling over the twigs, he ran towards the wood pile, grabbed the confused and frightened Lavrentiev by his sword-belt and shook him, shouting into his face:

"Quick! Along the line! No one is to fire a single shot! Damn you! Well! Fly!"

And he furiously shoved the split peak of his cap back from his wet forehead with the barrel of the Very pistol, maddened by his own inaction, and again flung himself at Nikitin, jumping over the great roots with his crooked legs.

"Lieutenant, lieutenant!" He almost struck Nikitin's elbow with the Very pistol as he pointed at the meadow. "What's he doing? Have you got an angel? A saint? But who needs this?"

But Nikitin did not reply. He was absolutely sure only that what Knyazhko was doing now only Knyazhko could have done and neither Perlin, nor he, Nikitin, nor Mezhenin, not battery commander Granaturov could stop him or alter his decision—that he knew.

There were no shots. The howling cries of the men had not ceased in the forester's house. Knyazhko, short, narrow-waisted, calm in appearance, like a boy himself now, walked across the meadow, his boots treading the grass with a measured, supple step, waving the handkerchief. He shouted out clear German sentences, putting his hand to his mouth so that he should be more clearly heard in the house. The insane howls ahead began to die down. And the dots of heads could be seen appearing in the apertures of the lower windows in the absolute, ringing silence. Then orders rang out, several voices shouted shrilly and after a moment a scrap of cloth, lowered from the window, flapped white, in the sun, timorously and uncertainly.

"Well! That's it, all over! Your angel is a fine fellow!" Perlin breathed a hot gust of tobacco into Nikitin's ear and struck him with unconsidered force on the elbow with the Very pistol. "A fine..."

Nikitin did not have time to feel irritation at Perlin's rough joy and did not hear the crushed, swallowed word shouted in his ear. He saw what, probably, Knyazhko did not see (because he was continuing to walk calmly towards the house): the white rag had disappeared, melted from the smashed attic window on the upper floor, and for a moment the silhouette of a head showed black, stuck out of the window, outlined by a circular helmet. It started to one side, an inhuman, choken cry rolled dully through the depths of the attic and at that moment a shot from the

field gun roared over the meadow like an impossibly prolonged avalanche—and everything on the edge of the yawning black emptiness of the abyss, covered with smoke, was broken off, as if there was nothing beyond.

But this avalanche and the white flashes of automatic fire from the attic window, where the silhouette of the circular helmet had shown dark, seemed to thrust at Knyazhko's chest; he took a step backwards, suddenly stumbled and took a step forward, falling strangely and quietly to his knees and throwing back his head, which made his small, foppishly neat cap fall from his head, revealing his fair hair, always neatly parted and combed. He drew his handkerchief over his face with a gesture of intolerable weariness and, as if still trying to look round at the gun and see something behind him for the last time, suddenly dropped his head and collapsed face down on the grass, barely distinguishable in the middle of the meadow as it shone beneath the hot sun.

"They've given us a little present! Done him in! They've done our lieutenant in, the swine!"

"What? Is that Mezhenin's voice? Why is he running towards me from the gun? What for? Knyazhko? Andrei? Surely not Andrei? Surely not him? Surely this can't have happened? These infantrymen, lying low? Perlin? Here? After the self-propelled guns? Today? Now? After they hung out a flag of surrender? Did they fire from the attic? Is he wounded? Killed? In a battle with boys? What boys? Someone shouted in the house! Why did he go? Perlin? What is Perlin shouting? What has happened to the gun crew? Where is the gun crew? Where are the shells? Shells! Shells! This house must be smashed, destroyed, burned! And I must go there, to Andrei, to Andrei! I know he hasn't been killed! No, point-blank shots! In the chest or the head? Shells! Shells!"

Nikitin shouted something mad, furious, thrust the iron lump in his throat down with a croak, not hearing his voice or the voices of the men and not seeing their white faces rushing about behind the gun, his self-possession and all the necessary restraint lost, his mind obscured by darkness. He felt the gun shudder as it was fired, felt something shaggy and fiery burst and fly apart ahead of them with pieces of log, saw how smoke, tinted by a red tornado, was forced from the ripped-out windows of the attic, the roof of which was gaping with holes, denuded rafters sticking out like broken ribs under the scattered tiles—and he could not come to himself, regain a grip on himself even when someone's vice-like hand gripped his

fingers, clenched in a fist, fingers which he had unconsciously struck against the trunk of a pine while giving orders, skinning them and drawing blood. Mezhenin stood before him, covered with sweat, black from the sooty gases, only his eyes showing red, inflamed, from behind lashes blackened by the smoke, squeezing his hand soberingly.

"There are no more shells, lieutenant," he said sombrely and quietly. "There isn't a single shell. Let's go over there."

"What? No more shells?" The words did not reach Nikitin through the dark shroud swathing his consciousness. "How is that? Has he been killed? Has Knyazhko been killed?"

He trembled and his legs buckled.

"Let's go, lieutenant," Mezhenin repeated and, lowering his eyes, moved slowly in the direction of the heavy, shadowy silence of the meadow, filled with the smoke of a fire...

"Are there no more shells? Andrei is there ... Let's go to Andrei! Has he been killed? Has he been killed?"

Ahead of them, behind the smoke, flames were twisting on the meadow in hot silence. There was not a single shot. The forester's house was burning and from right and left of the fire the cheerfully malicious voices of the infantrymen could be heard. They were evidently pleased by the rapid assault they had carried out on the house: their voices were the unreal, jagged sounds of beings from another planet, who did not understand what had happened and never would understand what had happened now in the world. And there, in front of this house, Knyazhko had been lying on the meadow for several minutes, brought down by an automatic burst fired point-blank and around him the irrevocably short and mercilessly blunt word "killed" already circled.

"Has Knyazhko been killed? Has Andrei been killed? But that's impossible. That's a lie! That's a mistake! Anyone you like could be killed, only not him! Not him!"

A dull shroud covered Nikitin's consciousness and he had still not come to himself or regained his grip on himself when, as if against the current, he shakily approached and dimly saw, not, at first, Knyazhko's face but his body in that awkward position, his head bent down towards his arm, which was pressing to his chest a bloody handkerchief, as if concealing, masking from human eyes the blow that had brought him death. For some reason Perlin, the company commander, who had preserved the lives of his men at the accursed forester's house, was squatting on his heels, wearing his old and absurd

"charmed" groundsheet, spreading the nostrils of his unpleasantly flattened nose by his slackened breathing. Softly he took the handkerchief, stained with the colour of death, from Knyazhko's lifeless hand, carefully felt his chest with strong, stubby fingers and wiped them on the grass, raising his coal-black, doggishly guilty eyes to Nikitin before moving them obliquely away. Short and strong, like life itself, he half-rose, grunted and said, apparently moderating as much as he could a voice roughened by infantry commands: "Two bullets simultaneously ... near the heart." At the sight of Knyazhko's helpless pose and handkerchief on the grass Nikitin, feeling that he could strike Perlin, this life preserved in the coarse envelope of a flat face, a nose squashed in the middle and the cast-iron voice, shouted with anger and hatred:

"Listen to me, senior lieutenant! Take that damned magic groundsheet of yours off! Let's put him on the groundsheet! Quickly, I tell you!"

And with a trembling that shook his entire body he bent down to Knyazhko's head and carefully turned his face round with both hands; pale, spattered with blood, calm, remote and mysteriously young, as he had never seen it before. He felt that something was stifling him, that something was stuck in his throat, felt that he would burst into tears now or laugh from the dull pain, from the injustice of what had happened and from the hopeless loss of himself.

The expression on Knyazhko's dead face had nothing in common with that expression of calm ascetic will which made people obey him. It was turned towards the peaceful past he had seen in his last moment—a past with other, former, quiet duties, with the rustling of books, with asphalt smoking after rain by the school—towards what belonged to childhood, towards what was clear and had been forgotten during the war both by Knyazhko and by him, Nikitin, as their mothers' voices were forgotten. But Knyazhko rarely spoke of the past and this boyish expression no doubt came from his fair hair, invariably combed with an officially adult parting: it was pushed obliquely on to his pale temple now, pushed, evidently, at that moment when, scorched by the burst of fire in his chest, he had fallen to his knees, for some reason drawing the handkerchief across his face...

1975

VASSILY SUBBOTIN

How Wars End

(Chapters)

The Grey Building

When dawn came, everyone in Himmler's house went to the windows in the hope of seeing the Reichstag. But they were disappointed; there was a building in the way.

Battalion Commander Neustroyev was also staring over a windowsill in the basement. It was high in the wall and he could not see much. On the right were the trees of a park, still bare and black. The damp of April, of last year's rotted leaves was in the air. On the left was a deep defence ditch. Moisture was dripping from the roof. The building Neustroyev saw ahead of him was not very high, rectangular, partly screened by trees. It did not seem very large, although it did have a dome and small towers at each corner, but there was nothing special about it.

The men who had gathered at the window with him were puzzled. They, too, had expected to see the Reichstag, yet there seemed to be no sign of it.

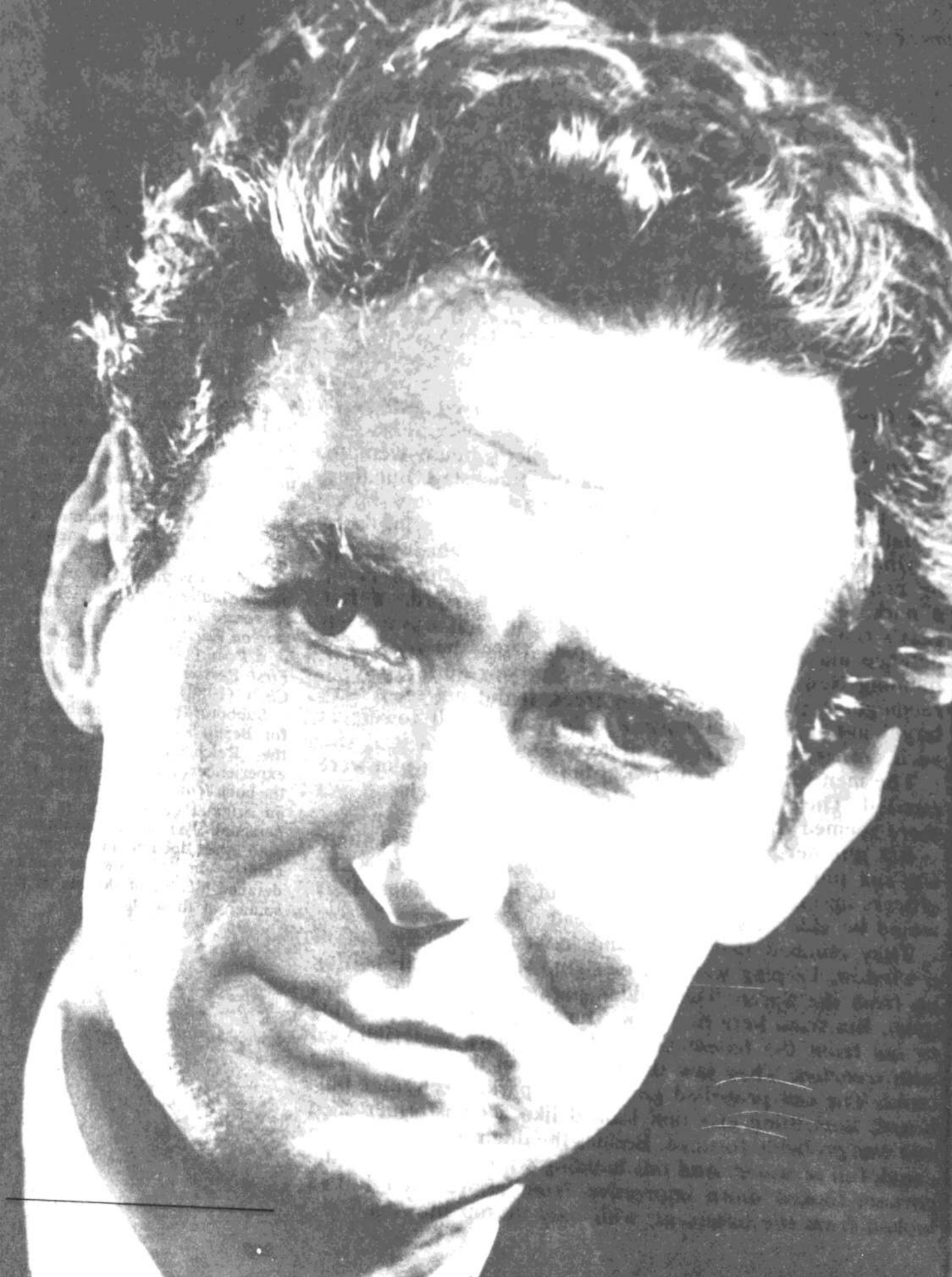
But another Battalion Commander, Davydov, said there was not much of a view from the basement and took the officers upstairs to have a look round. From up there they would be able to see the way ahead.

They climbed two floors and looked cautiously out of a window, keeping well out of sight. Mist was still drifting up from the Spree. The sodden park was deserted. It was quiet. But from here they saw what they had not been able to see from the basement—that the square was ribboned with trenches. They saw the pillboxes on the corners. The tanks. The self-propelled guns in the park. A circular billboard. Something else that looked like a transformer shed and was probably fortified. Besides the ditch there was also a canal, full of water. And this building with the towers at the corners looked more impressive from above than it had looked from the basement, with only its top showing.

Vassily Subbotin (b. 1921)—Soviet poet and prose writer. At the outbreak of the war he was on the Western border of the USSR, where he was serving as deputy company political leader. Later he became a reporter with a divisional newspaper.

Subbotin is the author of the books *Soldier of Peace* (1950); *A Heroic Ballad* (1953), *Summer on Earth* (1962), *The Life of a Poet* (1970), *Novel in the First Person* (1979), and *Red Cliffs* (1980).

Subbotin fought in the battles for Berlin and the storming of the Reichstag. His wartime experiences form the basis of the book *How Wars End* (1965), an original combination of the personal, lyrical and dramatic with the documentary, particularly in his factual and detailed picture of the life of a soldier of those days.



A messenger arrived. It was for Neustroyev. Division Commander Shatilov wanted to know why he wasn't advancing.

"Comrade 77! There is a grey building in the way."

"What did you say? What building?"

"Straight ahead of us! I shall go round it on the right."

Neustroyev, lying by the telephone in a corner of the basement, and the division commander at his observation post in Moabit, both leaned over their maps ...

Zinchenko, the Regimental Commander, came into the observation post. He had set up his headquarters across the river, next to the Swiss Embassy.

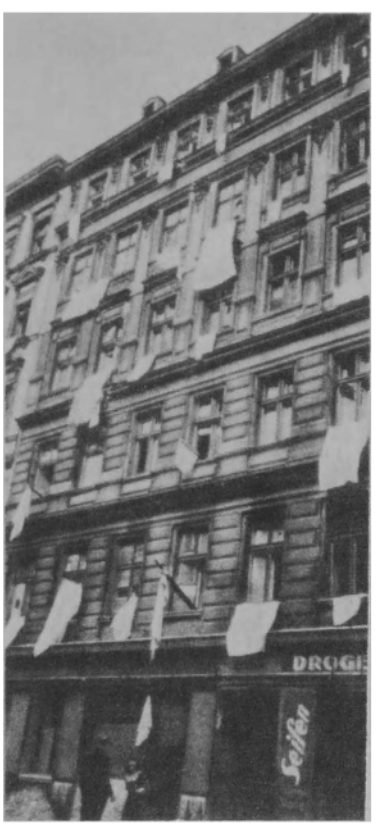
"What's the matter? Give me the map." They made various reckonings. Moltke Bridge ... the Spree ... Himmler's house...

"Neustroyev! That *is* the Reichstag!"

It had never occurred to him that this grey, rectangular building right in front of the windows, so close to him, was actually the Reichstag that he had been straining every nerve to reach.

Above its ribbed dome there was a platform with a spire. The front of the building was lined with trees just about to burst into leaf, still not torn or scorched.

But not many people saw it like this, only those who were there early that morning. One hour later the artillery went into action. Rocket mortars and shells were pumped into the Reichstag at long and short range and it soon acquired the appearance we know so well from photographs taken after the war.



It Is Not Generally Known

It is not generally known that after we had mounted our flag on the Reichstag the fighting continued in the building for another two days and two nights.

One thousand five hundred Germans, brought in from the Baltic area during the actual assault on Berlin, had installed themselves in the cellars of the Reichstag. They pounded us with Faustpatronen, a powerful anti-tank weapon of which they had plenty. And when they realised the Reichstag could not be recaptured, they set fire to it. Or it may have caught fire itself from the Faustpatronen.

It burned as any building does, and there was plenty to burn there—the furniture, the paint on the walls. The parquet flooring bulged and blazed, first smoke, then flames belched from the windows and the shell-holes in the walls. A handful

of our men—not more than three hundred—fought in the blazing building.

But this was not the only dramatic feature of the situation.

On the morning of May 1st, the 1410th day of the war, it was stated in a Soviet Information Bureau communique that Soviet troops had occupied the German Reichstag in the centre of Berlin and mounted the Banner of Victory there. This was also stated by Stalin in his May Day order.

Thanksgiving services were being held in Paris, London and New York. You had only to switch on the radio to hear the peal of bells. But even while the bells of victory rang, our men were standing in a narrow corridor of the blazing Reichstag, driven back to the wall by the flames and shielding eyes with their arms.

The battalion commander was told he could bring his men out. "Come out the Reichstag, take up all-round defensive positions and, as soon as the building burns out, you will start taking it again."

But there was no way out. Some of the men gathered in a small room, half choking in the smoke, put on their respirators—the few that had them—and lay on the floor. The flames were already creeping into the room.

Then something gave way with a crash. Yellowish smoke poured in through a gap in the wall. But it was not a new danger; it was a way of escape.

Through this unexpected loophole the men made their way into the neighbouring room, which had already burnt out.

The Germans failed in their object. The banner escaped the flames and remained flying over the Reichstag, only slightly darkened by smoke.

When the fire began to die down, all the exits from the cellars were again blocked.

The morning of May 2nd began to break.

Across the Königsplatz

"Entrance. Entrance. Entrance," the girl telephonist repeated steadily.

There was no reply.

Ten men who had gone out that day to repair the line had failed to return. Some had died on the way to the break, others on the way back.

Then the telephone started working again.

"Entrance receiving. Over."

Neustroyev grabbed the receiver. Ilya Syanov, comman-

der of an assault company, was reporting to his battalion commander. The enemy was mustering for an attack from the direction of the Brandenburg Gate. Syanov wanted the artillery to pound the main road.

Again that familiar screech was heard and heavy mortar bombs crashed down on the road ahead.

All through that long day — one of the most intense of the whole war — the fighting continued on the square in front of the Reichstag. Some of the attackers were crouching near the entrance. They had tried to charge but it was no use. The defence was still alive and active. In some places there were as many as two firing points to a window, besides the pillboxes at every corner and the self-propelled guns lurking in the park...

Across this large square, where so much fire was now concentrated, there ran a barely perceptible red wire. This was the thread that linked the men crouching in front of the Reichstag with the command and observation post, with those who were directing the fire of the batteries. With every fresh artillery onslaught that thin wire was slashed by splinters, but always some invisible hand, out there on the square that separated the command post from the Reichstag, would repair the break and communication would be restored.

When the telephone came on again, Syanov reported that German tanks had appeared to the right of the Reichstag.

The Soviet batteries opened fire again and two tanks were hit. (They were still standing there when it was all over, and figure in several post-war photographs.) The other tanks withdrew round corner.

When the building was eventually taken and most of the defenders had been driven down into the cellars there was a lull in the fighting. During this lull a soldier arrived at the battalion command post, which had by now been transferred from the bank of the Spree to a small room in the Reichstag itself.

His eyes were bloodshot, his tunic was torn.

Vera Abramova, the battalion telephonist, gasped at the sight of him. Signaller Alexei Melnikov had gone out with the others when the fighting had been at its height.

Now the battalion commander watched him as he walked quietly to the telephones in the corner of the room, knelt down and started turning their handles.

"Entrance?" (The call signs had not yet been changed.) "This is a test ..."

Obviously Melnikov had no intention of telling his story.

He was not going to say how he had taken cover in shell-holes, or how hard it had been for him to find the broken line on that shell-pitted square, or how he had ducked behind upturned cobblestones while he joined the broken line, or anything else about the vigil of that interminably long day.

The biggest problem had been getting across the canal. It was spanned by a sagging length of rail—all that was left of the demolished bridge. He had straddled the rail and edged his way forward, supporting himself with his hands to prevent himself from falling into the water... After mending the break, he switched on to check the line and listened, then went on again "line-crawling".

His eyes were bloodshot because he hadn't slept for days.

The commander put the receiver aside for a moment.

"Was it you who mended the line?"

"Yes."

"Colonel" Berest

A white flag suddenly appeared at the entrance to one of the cellars.

At the bottom of the stairs was an officer, his greatcoat thrown open, a pistol in his hand. He announced that the German command was prepared to begin negotiations. But only with a high-ranking officer.

The man who went down the stairs to meet the Germans was Berest, the Battalion Commander's Political Deputy, a lieutenant. He had been that only a few days; the promotion order had come through just as we were entering Berlin. Until then Berest had been only a junior lieutenant, although for several months he had been acting as Neustroyev's deputy. How they had managed to work together, I don't know. They were both very strong and contrasting characters.

Alexei Berest was twenty.

It was he who went down to the cellars.

The choice fell on him. Probably he himself said he would go.

A soldier poured water on his hands from a flask and he washed the grime off his face. He had always looked smart. Even after the two nights of the assault his collar still peeped whitely over the high neck of his tunic. Yesterday on the square he had been lying in the same shell-hole as his men. With two scouts, Kantaria and Yegorov, he had mounted the banner on the Reichstag. For the past twenty-four hours he had been at the command post with the others.

Berest put on someone else's long leather jacket over his tunic. Captain Matveyev, of the political department, gave him his peaked cap, a new one, with a crimson band.

Neustroyev went with him after merely throwing off his padded jacket, so that his medals could be seen. Berest had few decorations, but Neustroyev had plenty—let them have their effect!

The third man in their party was a Russian prisoner-of-war who had recently been liberated on the Oder. He knew German.

Down in the cellar the Germans were waiting for them. There was plenty of light—from blazing torches. The Germans surrounded them immediately, pistols in hand. They still had camouflage nets on their helmets.

A German came up to Berest and his companions. Berest looked at him closely—an Oberst! A colonel. With him were two sailors. Cadets. And an interpreter—a woman in a yellow jacket.

The German soldiers made way for them.

The colonel held out his hand. But Berest raised his to his cap and said: "Colonel Berest."

He stood there in his black leather jacket, tall, young, head erect. The second-in-command—a commissar. Impressive, broad-shouldered, self-assured. One of the Germans said: "Very young for a colonel!"

They hardly looked at Neustroyev. He was quite inconspicuous but for the gleam of his medals. The Germans occasionally glanced at his chest. (Compared to Berest the stocky Neustroyev seemed even shorter than he really was.) When Berest spoke to him, the battalion commander conscientiously came to attention.

"I propose that you surrender!" Berest said to the Germans. "You are trapped here, in the cellars. Your position is hopeless."

But the reply was:

"It is yet to be seen who is whose prisoner. There are three hundred of you in here. When you were attacking, we counted you. There are ten times as many of us."

"Lay down your arms," Berest said. "We shan't let you out of here." And he glanced at his watch, indicating that he wished to end the conversation.

The Germans' representative again tried to prove to Berest that he, Berest, was in the Germans' "clutches", and suddenly demanded they should be allowed to withdraw by way of the Brandenburg Gate.

Berest strove to control his anger. He was young—only twenty—and he forgot that he was a diplomat.

The Soviet Army lost 102,000 officers and men in the battles for the liberation of the German people from nazism.

"Why d'you think we came to Berlin?" he said. "To let you escape? If you don't surrender, we'll wipe out the lot of you."

The German colonel protested: "That is not the way to talk to truce envoys, Colonel!"

Berest refused to listen.

The sailors maintained a grim silence; the yellow-jacketed interpreter showed signs of nervousness.

Suddenly the German colonel broke into Russian, and reasonably good Russian at that. "We know the position we're in and we wish to surrender. But your soldiers are in a dangerous mood. You must withdraw them from their positions and form them up. We shan't come out otherwise."

"No!" Berest replied. "We haven't come all the way from Moscow to Berlin to parade our men in front of you. Even if there were two thousand of you to our two hundred."

"Very well," said the German. "I shall report that you propose we pass through your fighting lines."

There was no point in staying longer. Berest saluted. So did Neustroyev.

As the interpreter and Neustroyev mounted the stairs behind Berest, they heard "Colonel" Berest muttering to himself, "The swine! The swine!"

The Germans who had taken refuge in the cellars of the Reichstag surrendered that night. Or rather, in the early hours of the next morning.

This time the negotiations were conducted by Senior Sergeant Syanov.

Engraved on Our Memory

A soldier whom everyone remembers, the soldier who took the Reichstag was thought by his family to be missing. How could this have happened?

With a red flag in his hands he perished on the approaches to the Reichstag ... In the heat of battle he was forgotten.

When we write about him we always use the same phrase. "He was the first to leap from the window of Himmler's house and fell onto the steps of the Reichstag with a flag in his hands." For the majority of people who talked or wrote about him, he was simply Pyatnitsky, they don't even know his first name...

His family was not even informed of his fate and he was listed as "one who did not return". He had been a prisoner of war for two years. Pyotr Nikolayevich Pyatnitsky died April 30, 1945. He was born in 1913, and his address was

Bryansk Region, Kletnyansk District, village of Severets. He was wounded July 30, 1942, and taken prisoner in August 1942...

For fifteen years they knew nothing about him at home.

Those who survived could tell us about many of those who are buried in common graves. If only newspaper correspondents "deciphered" their notebooks from the front, how many names would return from oblivion!

How many of those considered as "missing" would we talk about now as heroes!

The lad who fell there, on the square... He was lying on the steps, and they moved him up to the column so he wouldn't be trampled on. That's how it was.

...This soldier, whom everyone remembers as the one who stormed the Reichstag was considered to be missing.

I cannot get Pyatnitsky's story out of my mind.

With the Flag

The Banner of Victory was mounted on the dome by Yegorov and Kantaria.

But there were other flags and banners as well. And although I wrote about them at the time, I want to write again of two daring men—not from Neustroyev's battalion, in which Kantaria and Yegorov served, but from Vassily Davydov's battalion—and of the flag they carried and planted on the Reichstag.

The two were alone together—enemy fire had cut them off from the rest. Using the cover provided by the low embankment of the canal, they crawled under the bridge. It was not far to the Reichstag. They could see the massive columns and steps of the main entrance, but this was as far as they could go. Their red banner, wrapped in dark paper (black-out paper torn from a window), was concealed under Koshkarbayev's jersey. Even here they could not lift their heads. The Germans were firing down from the upper floors and the attackers had to take what cover they could find behind kerbstones and upturned asphalt. Shells tore up chunks of paving; bullets snicked across the cobbles. The buildings behind them were ablaze. Little Bulatov, rather scared, still only a boy—his tunic was a little too long, and even his cap was too big—was scrambling about almost under Koshkarbayev's arm.

"What do we do now?" Bulatov kept asking.

(Koshkarbayev was the platoon commander, Bulatov was one of his men. Lieutenant Rakhimzhan Koshkarbayev was a Kazakh; Bulatov was a Russian, from Vyatka.)

Koshkarbayev said: "At least we'll try to fix our banner on the steps of the Reichstag—if we can't get any further."

They called it a "banner", although it was simply an assault flag, just a strip of strong, coarse cloth, like the one mounted by Yegorov and Kantaria.

They decided to sign it. With an indelible pencil they scrawled their names on the banner, and the number "674" beneath. The number of their regiment.

Towards evening, when it began to grow dark and a fresh attack was launched (the first, led by Pyatnitsky, had failed and his group had been wiped out), companies from two other battalions joined up with Syanov's advanced group. Koshkarbayev and Bulatov slipped out of their refuge and made a dash for the entrance. They reached the front wall with its sightless, bricked-up windows. Others joined them...

Bulatov and Koshkarbayev fastened their flag to the central column and later, when the left-hand part of the building had been cleared, they hung it out of a window on the first floor.

Their banner was eventually mounted on the roof, not actually on the dome, like the one mounted by Yegorov and Kantaria, but from above the cornice, near one of the towers.

The High Climb

At the time I asked Yegorov and Kantaria a lot of questions about what had happened and what it had felt like, but somehow I just couldn't get anything out of them except their names and a few biographical details. And the following:

When they reached the canal bordering the square they were thirty metres ahead of the infantry, and in the Reichstag, when they were looking for the way on to the roof, the Battalion's Second-in-Command, Berest, was with them. The banner was mounted at such and such a time. They seemed to think details were superfluous and out of keeping with the triumphant act of mounting the Banner of Victory.

But, perhaps, I can tell the story for them.

They were in a building where fighting was still going on; above them, on the upper floors, and below them, on the ground floor. It was hard to find their bearings: the windows were blocked up. It was dark. They had no idea what passage led where. And where were they to mount the banner? No one had told them that. They couldn't just put it anywhere. It had to be high. So that people could see it.

But here was a staircase. It seemed to be what they needed. And then another one, leading up from the landing. Straight on to the roof. How light it was up here! It had been dark as night inside. Shell fragments were whistling around. Good thing the roof was flat. Where could they fix the flag? Over the cornice there was a bronze figure on horseback. No, that wouldn't do. It would look as if he was carrying the banner. More fragments slashed across the roof. They must hurry. What about putting it up there, on the dome. The ladder had been hit and was hanging loose. They would have to climb the dome itself. How far apart these iron ribs were! And all the windows knocked out. But it was better not to look down through them. The conference hall yawned beneath, like a mountain gorge. And the roofing itself was thin and rusty. It made your flesh creep... What was that? Another shell splinter? No harm done, not wounded. And they had climbed a lot of roof. From the dome they scrambled up to the platform. Higher still. Dizzily high, and they weren't spidermen. The platform at last. Yes, this was the place for it. But don't look down. And here they fixed the banner, making it firm with their belts, and firmer still with the sheath. All without a word spoken. A good, sound job. Now they must get down as fast as possible and back to their own men.

At the time they didn't know they were mounting the Banner of Victory.

Shcherbina

I still have an old snapshot of a group of men just after they had come out of battle, standing on the steps of the Reichstag.

In front, and a little lower than the others, stands a soldier with a white bandage round his head.

There are both officers and men in the group. They are all wearing equally tattered, equally filthy uniforms, and scorched greatcoats over their shoulders, and you can't tell officers from men.

This young one with the dark eyebrows is standing one step lower than the rest. He is wearing puttees and holding a submachine gun. The long sleeves of his tunic are rolled up at the cuffs. His head bandage is fresh and clean. It almost gleams in the sunshine. Evidently he has only just had the wound dressed.

I think this is one of the most authentic pictures of the

war. They are standing on the steps of the Reichstag with everything still burning inside.

Who are these men? Who is that particular soldier? I only spoke with him once—in the Reichstag on the following day. I had never met him before the Reichstag was captured.

When I saw this picture I at once remembered his name. The name of yet another of our soldiers—Shcherbina.

When I sought him out in the Reichstag that day he was so tired of talking to newspapermen that he would willingly have gone away and hid himself. He had had no sleep ... after a week of continuous fighting. Still, we did sit down together on the square, opposite the main entrance, near where the photograph had been taken. Not far from that circular billboard, now ripped to pieces, I jotted down what he told me.

Shcherbina, Pyotr Dorofeyevich. Born 1926. That meant he was either 18 or 19 when he was in the Reichstag. His home address was: Zaporozhye Region, Skelka Village... In Berlin he was wounded in the head. But he refused to go for treatment and stayed with his battalion.

This is what he had to say about the fighting:

"We slipped out of the windows of Himmler's house one after another. Pyatnitsky went first. It was getting dark when we ran across the bridge. Rudnev and Novikov were with me when we crossed the square. And Prokhozhy, too. The fire was very heavy. I had never seen anything like it before. We reached the front steps and dashed up to them.

"We forced our way into a big room. The Germans were potting at us from the cellars and it was a good thing we thought of blocking the exits. The cellars turned out to be packed with Germans. Grenades and fausts kept coming up at us from below and chunks of plaster fell on us from the ceiling. But we stood by the exits and entrances and fought back with grenades.

"We had a tough time when the archives started burning. The whole place was full of smoke and the fire soon reached us. We just could't stay in that corridor any longer, so we climbed through a window into another room. Then we found a passage through the attic and followed it to a part of the building that was not on fire ...

"But we didn't leave the Reichstag. When the fire had burnt itself out we again attacked the cellars."

And that was all. Either I didn't put it all down, or that was all he told me.

In fact, the situation was much more dramatic, as can be seen from the accounts by others who took part in the fighting.

Yes, Shcherbina was with Pyatnitsky. Shcherbina's squad was the first to reach the entrance to the Reichstag and engage the enemy in the entrance hall. When the rooms began to fill with smoke and the Germans launched a counterattack through a gap in the wall, our men fell back.

"Stay where you are!" Shcherbina shouted. The men took cover and returned the fire, lobbing grenades at the Germans when they appeared through the gap.

Shielding their mouths from the smoke, they stumbled in semidarkness through a maze of corridors and rooms.

The acrid fumes stung their eyes and made them dizzy. It was impossible to stay there any longer.

Something, probably a faust, hit one of the walls with a crash and it collapsed right in front of them, nearly burying them all.

Shcherbina made his way over the rubble on to a staircase leading to one of the upper floors, probably the first.

"Follow me!" he shouted.

He had also swallowed a lot of smoke and felt he was choking. He led his men on, though he had very little idea where he was going, and they followed him. They followed that white bandage showing through the smoke. He took the lead because he believed he would find a way out.

He still had his head bandage when I talked with him.

Pursued by the fire, they made their way from one room to another until they found themselves in a part of the building where there was less smoke.

I have not yet mentioned the fact that when Kantaria and Yegorov were looking for the way on to the roof to put up the banner, it was Shcherbina and some of his men who guarded their rear on the staircase.

On the square in front of the Reichstag Pyotr Shcherbina was decorated with the Order of the Red Banner.

I should also mention the fighting on the bridge across the Spree and for Himmler's house, and the fact that when Pyotr Pyatnitsky had been killed it was Pyotr Shcherbina who picked up his flag.

Pyotr Shcherbina and Pyotr Pyatnitsky. Two brother soldiers, two heroes. A short but close friendship. Pyatnitsky was over thirty, the father of a family, but Shcherbina was still a mere boy, young and unmarried. At home he had a mother. And it was he who had mounted Pyatnitsky's flag.

So, that's who he is, the young soldier, wounded, with his head bandaged, standing on the steps of the Reichstag.

The Battalion Commander

The commander of the 1st Battalion stood for a while in the entrance, then walked with me down on to the square.

After several sleepless nights he still had not had time to make up for lost sleep and return to normal; he was reticent. But he did want to show me the places where the men of his battalion had fought.

We made our way across the square. It was strewn with masonry, slabs of asphalt and splintered branches.

From the embankment along the Spree the Reichstag seemed even more battered. The walls were breached and charred. The columns looked like gnawed tethering posts.

I had known Neustroyev for a long time and I knew him well. Seeing him here, on the broad steps leading up from the square across which his men had advanced, I thought of the little village of Poplavy, lost in the snows of the Kalinin Region...

The fighting round Poplavy started back in the autumn of 1943. But the Germans threw in fresh reserves and our offensive soon came to a halt.

But two months later, in winter, the artillery again went into action near Poplavy. As I approached the front line, I heard a long drawn-out cheer from the other side of the white hills—the voices of charging infantry.

In the half-ruined dug-out—there were several of them at the bottom of the ravine—the colonel in command of the regiment was sitting with his back to me at a radio set and reporting.

"Captain Neustroyev's battalion has broken through the defences and is now fighting in the third line of trenches."

That day I didn't succeed in meeting Captain Neustroyev. A month later I heard his name again, this time in connection with the fighting for the village of Staiki.

By then I knew all the battalion commanders in the division and was friendly with many of them. Only he eluded me.

One day, however, the division was withdrawn from the fighting line to build defences on the River Velikaya.

The snow had melted and the first blades of grass were sprouting from under the fallen leaves of last year.

A shortish man in a tight tunic, his boots plastered with red clay, was tramping along the line of trenches. I saw him stop at one of them and point out something to a man whose head was only just showing above the parapet. Then he went on from one sector to the next, inspecting the new trenches, bunkers and machine-gun emplacements. He was very busy and very quick.

This was Neustroyev.

After that we began to see each other more often. But not very often. He was not anxious to meet newspapermen; I realised that later.

During a smoke-break we lay on one of the hills above the River Velikaya, in a wood, and he became a little more talkative.

He had grown up in a city in the Urals. His people stilll lived there, mother, father and sisters...

Then the fighting started again. We tramped many roads and captured many heights before we arrived in Latvia. Poland, Pomerania, the Oder...

Neustroyev was wounded five times and badly shell-shocked. When a shell hit the dug-out he was in, everyone else was killed but he survived, though badly knocked about.

The five medals on his worn tunic told me where he had fought. All the way from Staraya Russa to Germany.

I recalled these things as we scrambled over the rubble on the square.

How Wars End

We had always sought to imagine what it would be like; war, war, and then, suddenly, peace. Suddenly the war is over.

Once I heard a conversation about this in a dug-out. Soldiers were questioning their sergeant-major who had fought in the Finnish War...[1]

"And so we took Vyborg," he started his story. "I had been ordered to deliver a despatch. While I was making my way through the forest, I met one of our own men.

" 'Where are you going,' he asked me.

"I stopped.

" 'The war's over. Peace!' he said.

"I didn't believe him. 'You're lying,' I said. I grew angry and shouted at him. 'What the hell are you talking about! Don't you hear the gunfire?'

"He said, 'It will last only till noon and then it will stop.'

"Well," the sergeant-major continued, "at eleven forty-five I was shell-shocked. When I came to, all was silent. I was lying in the snow all alone. It was there that I realised the war was over..."

I thought about this conversation many times since.

"This war will end some other way," I told myself. But I imagined that I would also be walking across a field or through a forest, alone, as usual. On my way to the regi-

ment on my normal newspaper business, when a soldier would run towards me waving his arms and smiling at something. I would walk past him and it would never occur to me that the soldier knows something I don't know...

That *it* would happen suddenly, that *it* would happen completely unexpectedly was taken for granted. And of course it would happen very soon. It's just on the point... If someone had told us then that the war would go on for four years, we would not have believed him. But then the first year passed, then the second and the third.

We did not think that the war would end in the ordinary old way, but that is what happened. The war ended when and exactly when they surrendered. When they were taken by the throat. They surrendered when we were climbing the ruins of their "parliament". It was not at all how we imagined it would be...

We had already driven the enemy out of our Motherland, but the war, the war went on. It went on until the fourth year, and even when we took Berlin...

Wars end in different ways, but this one ended this way.

I was sleeping. We had been in Berlin for a week without fighting... Mitya came up to me and woke me up: "Comrade Senior Lieutenant, get up. The war is over."

The war had, none the less, ended unexpectedly.

1965

BORIS GORBATOV

Surrender

Boris Gorbatov (1908-1954)—Soviet prose writer and State Prize winner. During the war he was a front-line correspondent for *Pravda*. He wrote a cycle of publicistic works entitled *Letters to a Friend* (1942) and *Alexei Kulikov, Warrior* (1942), the story *The Unbowed* (1943), the novel *Donbas* (1951), and other works.

The report entitled "Surrender" was transmitted to *Pravda* during the night of May 8, 1945.

On May 8, 1945, mankind heaved a sigh of relief. Nazi Germany had been driven to its knees.

The war was over.

Victory.

What could sound stronger, simpler and more humane than these words?

We had a long road to go to this day. It was a road of battles, blood and victories. We spared nothing.

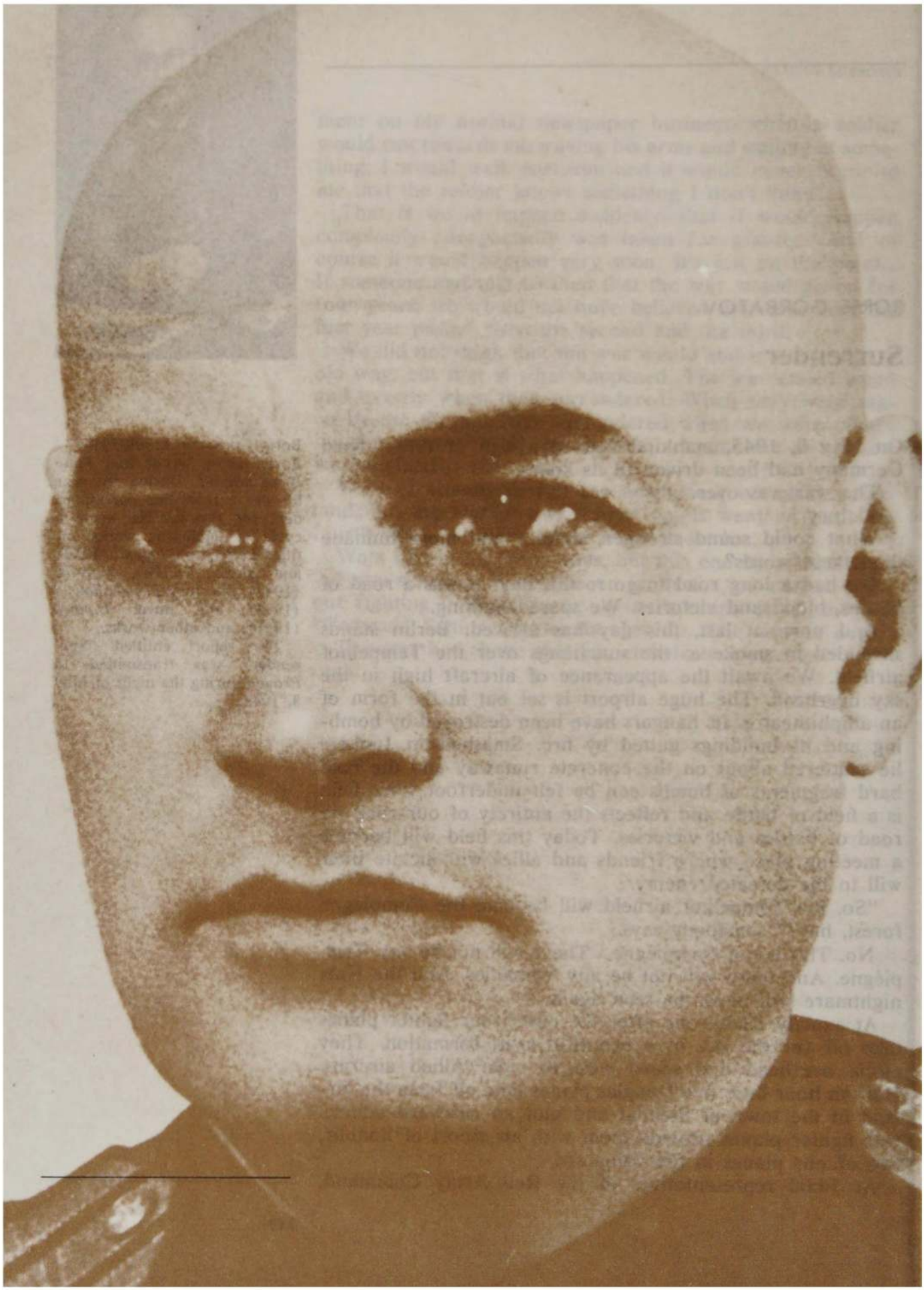
And now, at last, this day has arrived. Berlin stands shrouded in smoke as the sun hangs over the Tempelhof airfield. We await the appearance of aircraft high in the sky overhead. The huge airport is set out in the form of an amphitheatre. Its hangars have been destroyed by bombing and its buildings gutted by fire. Smashed-up Junkers lie scattered about on the concrete runaway and the cold hard fragments of bombs can be felt underfoot. This field is a field of battle and reflects the entirety of our road—a road of battles and victories. Today this field will become a meeting place where friends and allies will dictate their will to the defeated enemy.

"So, the Tempelhof airfield will become the Compiègne forest, hey?" somebody says.

No. This is not Compiègne.[1] There will not be any Compiègne. And there will not be any Versailles. And the Nazi nightmare will never be seen again.

At exactly 12:50, one after the other, our fighter planes take off for the sky in a beautiful swift formation. They circle overhead and speed west to meet Allied aircraft. Half an hour later five Douglas planes take off from the airfield in the town of Stendal and plot an eastward course. Our fighter planes provide them with an escort of honour, two of our planes in the vanguard.

At 14:00 representatives of the Red Army Command,



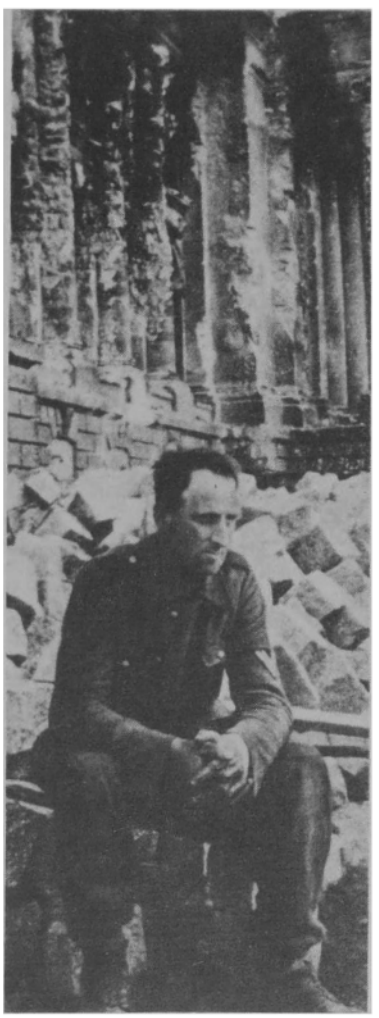
headed by General of the Army Sokolovsky, arrive at the Tempelhof airfield in Berlin. Douglases carrying American and British wing marking make an appearance in the sky. The planes land in unison and taxi along the tarmac.

From the aircraft emerge the delegation head of the Allied Expeditionary Force Supreme Command—Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur W. Tedder, behind him Carl Spaatz, Admiral Sir Harrold Burrough, officers of the British and American Army and Navy, newspaper correspondents and cameramen.

General Sokolovsky greets the head of the delegation and introduces to him Colonel-General Berzarin, the garrison chief and commandant of Berlin, and Lieutenant-General Bokov. The American and British generals and officers heartily shake the hands of their Soviet counterparts. Such a meeting of Allies and victors necessitates a firm handshake.

From the other airplane emerge representatives of the Nazi Command headed by Field Marshal Keitel. They walk sullenly and in silence, wearing their generals uniforms emblazoned with decorations and crosses. The tall, slender Keitel occasionally turns his head to one side to see Berlin shrouded in smoke. They walk to the awaiting cars. Having sat in one of the cars, Field Marshal Keitel immediately opens a folder and begins to read some kind of document.

Meanwhile, the victors, the Soviet, American and British generals and officers, stride across the concrete tracks of the airport and past the brave guard of honour of Soviet soldiers. The flags of the Allied Powers fly in the breeze. The orchestra plays hymns. With their strides hammering out a beat on the concrete, the Russian soldiers begin a ceremonial march. And what a joyous feeling in everyone's heart!



Everybody senses that this is a great occasion and that they are bearing witness to an act deciding the fate of generations. Head of the delegation of the Allied Expeditionary Force Supreme Command, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur W. Tedder announces over the microphone: "I am here as representative of Supreme Commander Eisenhower. He has authorised me to work at the impending conference. I am very glad to welcome the Soviet marshals and generals and also the forces of the Red Army. I am especially glad that I welcome them in Berlin. As a result of their brilliant cooperation, the Allies of both West and East have done an enormous job. It gives me a

great honour to deliver the warmest greeting to the East from the West."

The head of the guard of honour, Colonel Lebedev conveys these words to the ranks and declares: "To our victory, hurrah!" This powerful "hurrah" thunders throughout fallen Berlin.

Then the members of the delegations and all of those present at the airfield head for Karlshorst, a suburb of Berlin, where the Act of unconditional surrender of the German Armed Forces is to be signed. The journey encompasses the whole of Berlin, a thoroughly destroyed and vanquished Berlin which our troops had taken by storm.

A stream of vehicles speed through the streets of the German capital. Although the road has been cleared, the footpaths are littered with piles of bricks and rubbish. The ruins are traces of the work of Allied pilots and Soviet artillerymen. The victors speed through Berlin. Citizens of Berlin stand in silence at the crossroads. The victors speed through Berlin while in their wake follow the conquered Nazi generals carrying the instrument of surrender. What are they thinking of now as they drive through the streets of Berlin? Do they recall the parades or the last days of their downfall. Let them reap as they have sown.

The convoy passes under Victory Arch which was erected by our troops. Above it fly three flags bearing the words "Glory to the Red Army!" The stream of vehicles sweeps by under the arch as streets, ruins and people all flash by momentarily.

Here, at last, is Karlshorst. Karlshorst, this Berlin suburb, today went down in history before our eyes. This is the grave of Nazi Germany and an end to the war. Here, everything belongs to history: the building of the old German Military Engineering Academy where the Act of surrender was signed; the officers' mess and the four flags on the wall—Soviet, American, British and French—symbolising military cooperation; the tables, covered in a grey-green cloth and every minute of this meeting, which, short as it was, was filled with much anxiety and deliberation, all of this belongs to history. One wants each minute to be engraved on one's memory in great detail.

Into the hall come Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur W. Tedder, General Spaatz, Admiral Sir Harrold Burrough, General de Lattre de Tassigny and members of the Soviet, American, British and French delegations.

The historic meeting began and it did not last very long at all. Few people attended in the hall and very little was

said. But behind the words are the long years of the war. Marshal Zhukov, followed by Marshal of the Royal Air Force Tedder announced that the representatives of the German High Command had arrived to accept the terms of unconditional surrender.

"We invite representatives of the German High Command," Marshal Zhukov says to the duty officer.

The German generals enter the hall with Field Marshal Keitel in the lead. He walks trying to maintain his dignity and even pride. He raises his Field Marshal's baton but then lowers it again. He wants to cut a fine figure despite his shame but his face begins to tremble. Today, here, in Berlin, is his final "Platz Parad". Behind him comes General-Admiral von Friedeburg and Colonel-General Stumpf. At a table set aside for them they sit with their adjutants behind them.

Marshal Zhukov and Marshal Tedder announce: "Now all that remains is to sign the Instrument of unconditional surrender."

These words are translated to the Germans. Keitel nods his head: "Yes. Yes, surrender."

Do they have the authority of the German High Command to sign this Act of surrender?

Keitel produces the appropriate document which bears the signature of Gross Admiral Denitz and empowers Field Marshal Keitel to sign the Act of unconditional surrender.

"Do you have the Act of surrender at hand, are you familiar with it and are you agreed to sign?" ask Marshal Zhukov and Marshal Tedder.

The only words in the hall today concern the surrender which must be full and unconditional.

"Yes, agreed," answers Keitel.

He turns over his folder containing the documents, places a monocle to his eye and sets himself to sign the paper. However, Marshal Zhukov checks him.

"I invite the representatives of the German High Command to come to the table and sign the Act here," he says slowly.

He points to the place where he wants the Field Marshal to go.

With red spots becoming visible on his face, Keitel stands and walks to the table. Tears welling in his eyes, he sits down at the table and signs the document. He signs all the copies. All of this takes but a few moments. Everyone remains silent and only the clicking of the cameras disturbs the peace. In the hall at this moment nobody is

indifferent, just as the whole of mankind does not feel indifference. This is especially so in the Soviet Union. It is upon us that the Nazi war machine swooped in an all-out offensive. They burned down our cities, trampled our fields, slaughtered our people and wanted to steal the future from our children.

Now, in this hall, the Nazis are forced on their knees. The victor dictates his will to the vanquished. Mankind is disarming the beast.

Field Marshal Keitel has signed the Act of surrender. He stands and casts a glance about the hall. There is nothing for him to say and he has nothing to wait for any more. Suddenly, he gives a pathetic attempt at a smile, puts down his monocle and returns to his place with the German delegation. But before sitting down he once again extracts his Field Marshal's baton and lays it on the table. Next to sign the Act of surrender are General-Admiral von Friedeburg and Colonel-General Stumpf.

This all takes place in silence, not a word is uttered. Words are no longer necessary. All the essential words have been said by the Red Army and armies of our Allies. And now, all that is wanted from the Nazis is the unconditional surrender. Nothing else. The authorised Germans sign the Act in silence. Marshal Zhukov and Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur Tedder then add their signatures to the paper. Next to sign as witnesses are General Spaatz and the French representative General de Lattre de Tassigny.

Members of the German delegation can now leave the hall.

At the same time as they are leaving the hall, the German generals are also marching out of history. All those present at this historic congregation joyously congratulate one another with their victory. The war is over. Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov presses the hands of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Tedder, US General Spaatz and the other generals.

Victory! Today, mankind can breathe easily.

Today, the cannons are not firing.

Early hours of May 9, 1945

BORIS POLEVOI

These Four Years

(An Excerpt)

Last War Report

The unconditional surrender of Germany has been signed in Berlin. It is still difficult to believe that the war is over, but how wonderful it feels! When Lieutenant-Colonel Dorokhin told me about it over the telephone, I admit I was unable at first to take in the full significance of this piece of news. I thanked him, put the receiver back down on the green box, and only then realised that the war was indeed over. I took from my pocket a photograph of my wife, son, and tiny, dark-haired Alyona and, embarrassing as it is to admit it, suddenly broke down—for the first time during the whole of the war.

Half an hour later the trees of the old park literally reverberated with the sound of shots being fired spontaneously into the happy May night from every kind of gun. Everyone was firing out of anything to hand, firing regardless of the expenditure of ammunition—who had any need of it now the war was over? I also gave way, and fired off a whole cartridge clip out of the window. Captain Nikolai Finikov, a newspaper photographer, came in while I was engaged in this rather childish exercise. His face was a blank, and he was stark naked.

"Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel, are we under attack?"

"What attack? What's the matter with you?"

"There are shots going off in my room."

It was indeed true that shots were being fired in our own building, making the cracked mirror rattle plaintively. But why were there gunshots in Finikov's room?

The explanation was as follows. The press photographers were lodged, together with their dark room, upstairs in the attic. They had covered the windows with blankets to keep out the light. After developing some photographs, Finikov had gone to lie down and sleep for a while, and

had heard nothing about the surrender of Germany. The jubilant gunfire had woken him up, and some of the bullets had indeed whistled through the room where he was sleeping. Apparently, the drivers had been firing their rifles off into the ceiling. I had to give them a stiff talking-to. Now, quiet and rather chastened, they were setting the table for a celebration meal.

In the park outside shots were still being fired... The merry gunfire could still be heard when the soldier on duty telephoned from the military telegraph. He congratulated me with the victory, and then read out an urgent dispatch from Moscow. I still have it today, this last military assignment which arrived when the war had ended on every Front except ours. Here it is: "From Sapphire to Amethyst. To be delivered immediately to *Pravda* correspondent Lieutenant-Colonel Polevoi. Provide a detailed report of the liberation of Prague. Space unlimited. Remember, "*Komsomolskaya Pravda* correspondent Krushinsky is going to Prague with the tanks of Leliushenko, General Galaktionov."

Oho! That was Krushinsky for you! He had disappeared that morning, saying nothing to anyone. We thought that his reporter's spirit had taken him to the First Byelorussian Front to watch the signing of the surrender. While we were firing off shots into the air, revelling in victory, he, it seemed, was on his way with Leliushenko's tanks. I seized a piece of sausage from the table, left my companions and set off to "operations". Lieutenant-Colonel Dorokhin was on duty in the operations room, restless and bored. He confirmed that there was an anti-Hitler uprising in Prague, that many districts were in the hands of the insurgents, but that SS units had refused to lay down their arms and were attacking them. The insurgents were in a difficult position, and tragic telegrammes were being sent one after the other. He showed them to me.

"...The Germans are bringing fresh units into the city. We are outnumbered. We request the Red Army, the armies of the Allies, to give us urgent assistance..."

"...This evening the position worsened. The Germans brought in tanks. The artillery is firing on the barricades. We are bleeding to death. Brothers, we are waiting for your help... Red Army, work another miracle, save us..."

Dorokhin gave me the details: the Prague uprising had involved the centre of the city and the industrial districts. The SS did not recognise the capitulation signed in Berlin, and were waging furious battles, assuming the offensive. The powerful Army Group Centre was rolling back into

Prague from Silesia under the command of Field-Marshal Schörner.

It seemed that Marshal Konev's suggestion that Schörner was thinking of breaking through into Prague, joining up with SS units there and waging a protracted struggle from behind the cover of the city's historical monuments, waiting for the American divisions to arrive was now clearly justified. Meanwhile, judging by the tragic tone of the telegrammes, the uprising was indeed bleeding to death in street battles.

"And what is our command doing?"

"Marshal Konev has drawn up a plan for lightning operation, and *Stavka* confirmed it. Three armies have been ordered to march on Prague. The tank armies of Leliushenko and Rybalko have been given artillery units and are moving on Prague along two different mountain roads. Their assignment is to reach the city and surround it. The tanks are to cut off Schörner's retreat to the west, cross the Krušné hory and move at full speed, without any delay, towards Prague, leaving Schörner in their rear. Rybalko will enter Prague from the east and northeast, Leliushenko from the southwest. The main objective is to surround Prague with a steel ring."

"How large are the forces taking part?"

Dorokhin chuckled. The war was over, and the taboo was lifted from secrets.

"Ten tank corps. The armies of Pukhov, Zhadov and Gordov have been ordered to advance at full speed behind the tanks. Luchinsky, Koroteyev, and General Świerczewski, commander of the 2nd Army of the Wojsko Polskie, are to mount a resolute offensive."

Yes, just as everyone is relaxing and resting quietly after the war, here, on this flank of our Front, a grandiose battle is continuing.

A May night looked down over Germany. The whole of this enormous Front was silent. Only here, in Central Europe, on the soil of Czechoslovakia, a Slav country close and dear to Soviet people, the war continued with all its former force.

I interrupted my friend's rather academic explanations, and asked him to help me fly out to Prague. Krushinsky was going in with the tanks. Therefore the only chance I had of not lagging behind was to go by plane. Of course, I didn't tell Dorokhin about this. I simply showed the telegramme from General Galaktionov. How could I miss an operation on such a scale!

On hearing my request, the Lieutenant-Colonel whistled.

"A plane! Nothing less! In the first place, our *Utochka* can't make it there and back. Who will refuel you over there? Secondly, no pilot will fly at night without preparing first, particularly when there is no information about the flight-path or whether there is anywhere to land. Thirdly, let's drop the day-dreaming. Far better take a seat and join me in a drink. I have some cognac."

I persisted, however, and finally convinced him: a historic battle, the finale of the war... At this point Dorokhin spoke up:

"How could we let you go along with the plane being flown by the one pilot who has some idea of the flight-path? He is to bring back confirmation that Prague has been taken. The plane is at the disposal of the Front Chief of Staff."

So, there is such a plane! I now seized hold of this fact.

"Confirmation? Fine, I could send that confirmation. War correspondents had had assignments far more arduous than that. This was the night of victory, a light, slightly green-tinted, wonderful night. On a night like that even the impossible was possible.

I went to all the Front commanders, requesting permission to fly out with this plane. Nobody was sleeping, and nobody was bothering about black-out. It was strange to see the lights in the windows of the buildings where Front headquarters were sited. Everyone was in an exceptionally good mood. They welcomed the press correspondent with emphatic cordiality, like an unexpected mother-in-law. They took me to the table and invited me to join them, but would not let me talk about any plane. I gradually moved up the ladder, receiving refusals wrapped up in the most polite and well-meaning terms. Finally I arrived at the top rung of the ladder.

The commander was, of course, also not sleeping, but leaning over a table on which, instead of celebration delicacies, there was a map of precisely that sector which Dorokhin had just shown to me. The Marshal looked through the sheet with the latest dispatches and extended the red lines on the map which came from two directions to plunge into the green of the Krušné hory.

"Congratulations on the victory, Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union!"

Having unhurriedly completed drawing the arrows, Konev put down the pencil and magnifying glass, and took off his glasses.

"A little early with your congratulations. The final victory is late arriving here. We still have to win it. That's the way things are. Well, and what's your news?"

I suddenly began to recall the time I first went to introduce myself when the Kalinin Front was still preparing to join battle for my native town. I was planning to get through to the partially surrounded tank brigade under Colonel Rotmistrov, and told him about my intentions... The commander listened to these recollections, and a sly sparkle lit up the depths of his pale blue eyes... Suddenly he interrupted me:

"A plane, is that it?"

"Ivan Stepanovich, it's the last time I shall come to you with such a request."

"The last time," he began to laugh openly. "So, the last time? You're quite right. I don't think you will have further occasion to destroy our HQ planes. I've already been told over the phone about your efforts, and I've given the necessary instructions," and he gave me a powerful handshake. "Well, you'd better be off then. Let us know what's happening there. Moscow is waiting for news." Then he added with sudden warmth: "You understand? I wish you every success."

Success! Could there be any success better than this? The east was just beginning to turn pink when the popular little *U-2* plane, which had so many nicknames—*Utochka* and *Ushka,* and *Kukuruznik* and *Etazherka,* chugged out onto the runway, leaving bright-green, emerald tracks on the grey, dew-covered grass.

Soon the pilot and I were already plotting our route across the Krušné hory to the large industrial town of Most. The pilot was an old friend of mine, Captain Sevastyanov, with whom I had flown to Oswiecim. In Most, if all went well, we'd land and find out what was happening, and then fly on to Prague.

This time, in addition to my newspaper assignment, I also had to carry out the duties of staff officer. I was to make contact with the leaders of the uprising, clarify the situation, and then try and transmit the information using the insurgents' radio set, which was sending its appeals out through the airwaves. Well, if our luck held, we would send the message.

"Why are you on your own this time? Where's your friend?" asked Sevastyanov, who had flown Krushinsky and myself to Oswiecim.

"He's on his way with Leliushenko's tanks."

"Competition?"

"Socialist emulation."

We were flying, as agreed, at quite a height. The first rays of the sun were already shining from behind the peaks of the mountains still wrapped in darkness.

Next we saw movement on the grey threads of the road. Cars, infantry, tanks, self-propelled guns, more cars... Then a few kilometres of empty road, and again columns of troops moving with their equipment. This time, however, they were German troops. What was happening? Where were our tanks? Had we missed them? No, they had carried out the orders of their commander, making their way through Schörner's positions. There they were, making their way down from the mountains to the road which ran through the hilly valley. Yes, tanks, with soldiers sitting on them.

What a pity there was no transmitter on board the plane so we could inform headquarters about these troop movements?

I gestured to Sevastyanov to drop lower. He himself had already noticed our troops and had begun to lose height. Now we were literally crawling over green slopes, picturesque hills, towards something large and shrouded in brown, poisonous smoke. What was burning?

Sevastyanov handed me the board with the map. It was the town of Most which was burning. What were we to do now? We decided to land. We came down directly onto the road, and were immediately surrounded by a crowd of peasants. They began shaking our hands and shouting something in welcome. They wanted to take us with them to their village, but we had no time. We learned that the Nazis had left Most last evening, setting fire to the oil refinery, and were now moving towards Prague.

Numerous volunteers, all getting in each other's way, helped us to turn the plane against the wind. When it was running up the take-off, someone pushed a large bouquet of bird-cherry into the pilot's face. I put one small bird-cherry blossom between the pages of my notebook as a souvenir of our first meeting with Czechia.

We're flying rather low. The sun could already be seen above the hills, and the river looping its way between them glittered in the sunlight. Was it the Elbe or the Vltava? Before I had time to locate it on the map, I could already see on the horizon the sharp spires of churches through the morning mist.

Prague! I had never seen the city, but long wished to visit it, having come to love it through the stories of Slovak insurgents. This lovely city was dotted with fires, though happily not many. We could see the national flag flying on the first streets which passed beneath us, and crowds of people dressed in bright spring clothes. The pilot flew low around the city. There were crowds everywhere, huge numbers of people. Yet some of the streets,

and even whole districts, were empty—that was where there were barricades and fighting. The gunfire was particularly heavy around the three bridges. There the artillery was in charge. However, we were not fired on. Perhaps they were too occupied to bother about our plane, or perhaps it was too insignificant a target for the Germans.

I jotted down a note for the pilot: "Go down and find somewhere to land." He read it and turned round with a grin which told me not to teach him his business. He continued to circle and so low that the arrow-like spires of the churches were on a level with the wings of the plane.

The people below had no doubt already spotted the red stars on the wings. Our small craft, which the Germans contemptuously referred to as "the coffee mill", was causing tremendous enthusiasm below, among the crowds. People were waving, shouting. If only we'd land quicker.

At first we tried to land on a large rectangular square. Squares! Our pilots already knew that Hitler's personal pilot, a daring and skillful woman, had landed her plane on one of the squares in Berlin in order to fly out her "adored Führer". Perhaps Sevastyanov wanted to imitate her exploit? Below, people began to clear the square, apparently guessing the pilot's intentions. However, as he was coming down to land, he spotted a network of tram wires and, thank goodness, rapidly gained height. We made a wider circle. On the other side of the river we made out a large stadium surrounded by high stands. We took a closer look. No better place to land a plane. Captain Sevastyanov had had to land his plane in the most unlikely places. During the spring thaw he had landed his plane, carrying the commander, on the vegetable plots near the village of Tolstoye, outside Korsun-Shevchenkovsky, on a runway of straw laid over the melting snow and unable, in fact, to withstand the load.

Well, let's take the risk! We seemed to slither down the stands, and the plane touched on the flat sports ground on all three wheels. We ran successfully along the ground, and at the last moment nose-dived and smashed a propeller against the wooden fencing round the stands on the far side. We had landed fairly successfully, with no disaster. Just for a moment I wondered how we would take off without the propeller. Then came a second thought—what for? The tanks were already approaching.

Some armed men were running towards us across the sports field wearing sand-coloured battle-dress with red bands on their caps. We guessed that these were the insurgents. They were shouting something. They shook our hands,

slapped our shoulders and then as one man, lifted us up and carried us across the stadium, placing us down again carefully in front of a restaurant or bar in the stands on the other side. We just had time to read the sign—"Champion"—before we found ourselves sitting at a table. Well, so be it. The word "champion" sounded just as good in Russian.

There were quite a few people in the bar, most wearing the same sand-coloured battle-dress, but some in civilian clothes and workmen's jackets. However, all were belted like soldiers and all were carrying arms. It turned out that this was a kind of district headquarters. We learned that the Germans had already left this part of town, and that there were battles in the centre, round the factories and at the bridges, particularly at the bridges. The German artillery was located there, and their tanks.

The Chief of Staff, an elderly, sinewy man, also in sand-coloured battle-dress, but wearing a peaked soldier's cap with the large cockade of the Czechoslovakian army which I knew from the corps commanded by General Svoboda, took out a tourist map and quickly sketched out the situation: the battle targets, places where the SS men were concentrated, their batteries and tanks.

"Are you an officer?"

"Ano, ano, an officer."

Without our asking for it, he then gave us the map he had marked. He had a quick mind and had realised why we had come before we had given any explanations.

"We need your headquarters. Headquarters."

"Ano, ano. This is the headquarters," and he marked on the map a house close to the square.

"And the radio station?"

"Ano, ano—it's here." It seemed he had already thought of everything, even this. Yes, it was a fine thing to have red stars on the wings.

"And how do we get to headquarters?"

"The doctor over there will take you."

The doctor's car was an amazing vehicle with a large round cylinder attached to the roof. This cylinder contained gas, used in place of petrol. Nonetheless the car went quite quickly. The doctor took us across the bridge adorned with stone statues of saints in fanciful poses, carved in a baroque style so ornate that they looked as if they were suffering from stomach-ache and writhing in pain. This bridge had been taken by the insurgents, but fighting continued to right and left.

There were quite a few people on the streets in the centre of town, but there was firing going on. SS machine-

gunners were being driven out from the rooftops where they had stationed themselves and from where they were firing on the crowd. Caught, they were also dealt with rapidly—simply tossed from the roof. The national flag was to be seen everywhere—large flags hanging from balconies and windows, and smaller ones on shop doors. In addition to the three-coloured national flag there were also a few red ones.

We drove past the large, elongated square where we had thought of landing. "Václavské náměsti," said the doctor. Now we were approaching another square of quite different, medieval appearance. In the middle stood a monument to Jan Hus. Hus was standing among his followers and apparently looking with anguish at an old and beautiful building blazing in front of him.

"The Town Hall," explained the doctor, "our old Town Hall," and there were tears in his eyes. "The SS did not even spare that," and in a sidestreet he showed us an ancient clock which the Nazis had blasted with a mortar. The clock had been telling the time for five hundred years.

Not far from this clock was the entrance to a large basement. Here, it seemed, was the headquarters of the uprising. However the basement was empty now. On the tables and floor we found chewed cigarette butts, paper, in the corner a blood-stained enamel bucket out of which there protruded—an amputated arm. An operation must have been performed here.

No one knew where headquarters were. Obviously the location was a secret. Even our military uniform, which had evoked such enthusiasm, did not help us to locate it. Nor was this caution unnecessary, for it was said that Vlasov men[1] were roaming the city in our uniform. Moreover, we were not in such urgent need of headquarters. I had no message to hand over, but I had to report back on the situation in the city.

"And what about the radio?"

"Ano, ano, a radio. Rozhlas."

Sevastyanov and I were taken by the doctor to the street on which the Rozhlas, as he termed it, was situated. In all probability this was the radio committee. The battle for this building had apparently ended only recently, for the barricades had still not been dismantled. Several Germans in black SS uniforms were lying on the tarmac, while the bodies of insurgents were lying in the gateway. The dead had been covered with a national flag. Spent cartridge cases rattled beneath our feet. They lay scattered all over the road.

The doctor took us not to the main entrance, which was barricaded from inside, but to a basement in a courtyard. A bomb shelter? No, an operating room. Guards with a machine-gun were standing at the door. They stared at us, amazed, and without asking to see our passes, pushed us towards the door, beside which there was some apparatus. Inside the operating room tired, unshaven men rushed to embrace us and shake our hands. They were still hot from battle. Yes, they had won back the Rozhlas, had not allowed the Germans to occupy their radio station.

I learned that it was from this basement headquarters that the insurgents had sent their tragic appeals to their Soviet brothers, to the troops of the Red Army.

I explained that now I had to use the radio station to transmit a report to Front headquarters.

"What do you need, Lieutenant-Colonel?" one of them suddenly asked in perfect Russian.

"Do you speak Russian?" I asked rather cautiously.

"I'm Russian. My name is Chirikov, Yevgeny Yevgenyevich Chirikov."

"Chirikov? Yevgeny Yevgenyevich? You're not by any chance the son of the writer Yevgeny Chirikov?"[2]

"What, do you still remember my father?" my companion was happily surprised. "I'm a radio engineer. If you need my help, please ask. The radio is working... Have you really read the works of Yevgeny Chirikov?... Will you be sending an open text, or in code?"

"The war is over, so why restrict ourselves over the air?"

"Unfortunately it is still continuing here. Two of my friends have just died. Perhaps you saw their bodies?"

I sat down at the microphone and, in violation of all regulations, asked our radio operators to describe the situation in Prague. The map given me by the insurgents' officer was lying in front of me. The son of the émigré writer, a pleasant man with a limp, helped me with the Czech names. I asked the front-line radio operators to transmit the message immediately to Two, the simple code for General Petrov, Front Chief of Staff, and then dictated a very long message for *Pravda* in Moscow about the situation in Prague. My last Second World War fuse. The cunning Krushinsky, who had slipped away with the tanks, was still on his way to Prague with Leliushenko, while my report, if all went well, would soon reach the table of my rigorous chief, General Galaktionov.

The report was easy to dictate. I saw before me only the microphone and those pictures of the Prague uprising which I am now describing. While I was dictating there was a noise behind me and exclamations.

"I would advise you to add one more sentence to your report, Lieutenant-Colonel: at dawn Soviet tanks entered the city from the Hruševic side. The population is giving them an enthusiastic welcome, showering the soldiers with flowers." I looked round. Yevgeny Yevgenyevich was standing behind me, smiling broadly and leaning on his walking stick. Rozhlas had apparently just received the news. I agreed that it was a fine sentence, and highly appropriate. I added it and thanked the front radio operators who had taken my message. They were to tell Moscow that this was the first part, and that the rest would be sent at 16.00.

Victory Day. A day of miracles. On that day, so it seemed to me, miracles had to occur. Captain Sevastyanov was worried about his plane, and the doctor drove him in his old banger to Stragovo, to Sokolský Stadium, where the plane was standing, while two armed youths conducted me to Václavské náměsti. It looked as it had before. Our tanks were driving across the huge rectangle, moving cautiously, like benevolent elephants, as they made their way through the huge crowd. Dust-caked soldiers of the motorised infantry were sitting on the tanks and smiling shyly. The crowd was throwing flowers, packets of cigarettes, wreaths woven of lime twigs. An enterprising girl in national costume, on one of the tanks, had taken up, as it were, the pose of Liberty from a painting by Delacroix. The soldiers on the tank were carefully holding her steady.

And then, by a large equine monument on a tall pedestal which dominated the square, I had an unexpected meeting. Sergei Krushinsky! Wearing a tankman's helmet and a military shirt which seemed velvety with dust, he was autographing postcards handed to him from all sides, constantly pushing back the helmet, which kept sliding down over his eyes. He had arrived with the first column of Leliushenko's tanks, and was now taking the fire of enthusiasm and gratitude addressed to the liberation army.

"Is that you? How did you get here?"

We embraced and then tried to make our way through the crowd. It was no easy task. We were constantly stopped, embraced, kissed. By the museum our path was firmly blocked by an elderly gentleman holding a crystal carafe and a glass. He insisted that the Soviet officers should try ... this home-made liqueur. He himself was a legionary, had been in Russia during the First World War and still spoke some Russian. His home-made liqueur was "special". It seemed he had buried the bottle seven years previously, when Prague was occupied by the Germans. He had buried it and sworn to his wife that he would not

touch it until the capital was free of Boches. Now the time had come. Suddenly he said, with a Siberian accent: "Taste it." We did not have to be persuaded, particularly as this blackcurrant liqueur, which had lain for seven years in the ground, indeed merited our attention. We drank and listened.

"At' Žiie Rudá armáda!... Praze-nazdar!"

Well, so be it. We drank a second glass. Then we thanked the old legionary and moved on. Then came a truly fantastic meeting.

At the corner of Václavské náměsti, beside a very expensive shop, we saw a rather short, middle-aged lady with a head of curly hair and an exceptionally pleasant round face. She stood out from the crowd because she was wearing national costume—"kroj", as Krushinsky referred to it, already beginning to adapt to life in Prague. In her starched lace cap from beneath which escaped her curly hair, a richly embroidered blouse, short, pleated skirt and striped stockings, she resembled a character from *The Bartered Bride* who had stepped down from the stage. She was carrying a basket covered with a serviette. The basket held a large jar and thimble-like tumblers. She also stepped deliberately into our path, pointed to her basket and said, her Russian overlaid with a Czech accent:

"Gentlemen officers, please take a drop of Plum liqueur."

We glanced at each other. We had the warmest memories of Slivovitsa from the days of the Slovak uprising[3]. However, we neither of us had any local money. The woman understood our embarrassment.

"No, no, you are our guests, my guests. I want to give you a drink."

We drank to victory, to Prague and, of course, to the nice lady who smiled and filled the tiny tumblers. Krushinsky remembered he was a reporter, opened his map-case and took out a note-book. He still knew some Slovak words from the days of the Slovak uprising.

"May I ask your name?"

"Majerová," she replied with a smile.

"Are you a relative of Marija Majerova, who wrote *The Siren*?"

"I am Marija Majerova... Have you read my novel?"

At this point we, of course, told her our names, and she told us that before the occupation she had read our newspapers—*Pravda* and *Komsomolskaya pravda*—had visited Moscow, and had had business contacts with Soviet publishing houses. A meeting of fellow-writers on Václavské náměsti on such a day! Fact is stranger than fiction. She

invited us to go to her house for dinner, and was even prepared to sacrifice her only hen as the main course, although it was, in her words, a friend. To be frank, we were very hungry. We had not had a bite to eat since morning. The ration I had brought was in the plane at the stadium. However, Krushinsky was already in that excited state which overtakes him every time he has some interesting news, and which lasts until he can put it down and send it to the newspaper. So let the hen-friend continue to live and provide its mistress with eggs. Business before pleasure! We drank to another meeting in Prague or Moscow and parted friends.

According to Krushinsky, the vanguard of Leliushenko's army had been guided from the suburbs into the centre of Prague by a railway worker whom the tankmen had taken with them. Along the way he had told them that there was a prison known as Pankrac where the underlings of Heidrich, who had been executed by the Czech patriots, had tortured members of the Resistance. So we had gone to Pankrac. We had had no lack of people to go with us, and an hour later we had arrived. The battle with the SS, who had tried to hold out in the enormous prison building, had only just finished.

There were several of our tanks near the gates. The commander was a young captain with a blond moustache and one arm in a dirty sling. He tore our documents from our hands and looked at us suspiciously. This was not to be surprised at, as many said that Vlasov's men had scattered around the city wearing Soviet uniforms and were causing trouble. In a word, a picture similar to that in Czestochowa. The same methods, the same style. Convinced at last that we were who we said we were, the captain relaxed, brought down his guard, so to speak, and led us into the prison.

"This was a death factory. We caught it in operation," he explained to us, kicking open a massive door padded with felt.

It led into a huge room with a platform on which stood a heavy black table and three equally heavy chairs, an eagle and swastika on the back on the one in the middle. Behind this table the SS men played at being judges in a kangaroo court which passed sentences of death. It seemed that the "factory" had indeed been working only the day before. When they fled, the judges had abandoned their garments as well as the cassock of a pastor. And that was the long gown with violet edging which had obviously been worn by some supreme judge...

"Here—the sentence—and over there—the meat-grind-

er," explained the captain, sounding like a guide taking us on an excursion.

At the other end of the room a black curtain screened off another platform. Runners were attached to the ceiling, and from them hung well-greased nooses. They were on wheels which moved along the runners. In other words, here, before the eyes of the judges, they hanged the sentenced man, and then the body was rolled behind the curtain to free a place for the second ... the third ... the fifth. Altogether there were ten nooses working at one time. Behind the curtain there were coffins with handles and on wheels. Most of the coffins were empty, but two contained bodies—those of a man and a woman or, more accurately, a girl.

"They didn't have time to hide them, the bastards," muttered the captain through his teeth.

The captain had at his disposal a landrover of the kind known in the army as a "goat". He ordered the driver to take us to Rozhlas for we had not finished our assignment yet. I still had to end my report, and Krushinsky had not even begun his. At Rozhlas the corpses had been removed and the blood washed off the tarmac. I introduced Krushinsky to Yevgeny Yevgenyevich Chirikov and then, while they were talking about his father's books and arguing over his last novel, *The Beast From the Abyss*, which Krushinsky had picked up somewhere in Berlin, I shouted the last part of my report into the microphone.

What I shouted I now cannot remember very clearly. My head was whirling with all my experiences, and the drinks of liqueur. However, it was extraordinarily easy to dictate, and I recall a feeling of enormous, unthinking happiness. Krushinsky dictated slowly and in detail as usual, putting in all the full stops and commas, and as I dozed I listened rather enviously to his rounded, perfected improvisation.

Finally both of us requested the front-line radio operators, among whom we had many friends, to take charge of our reports, recast them in the language of the telegraph and send them to Moscow. We asked the radio operators at the General Staff to inform our offices that the reports were on their way...

I recall only vaguely how we said farewell to the Czech radio operators, how we kissed Yevgeny Yevgenyevich Russian fashion. I remember nothing at all about the freckled soldier who drove us to the stadium and shepherded us into the "Champion" bar. Captain Sevastyanov was sleeping the sleep of the warrior. The bar proprietor, who looked as if he had once been a boxer, a huge fellow with a flat nose and cauliflower ears, solemnly placed in front

of us a dish with steaming frankfurters, a jar of mustard, and beer in large tankards. Apparently he had called upon all his reserves, but absolutely refused to accept any money—"You are our most welcome guests". And when Krushinsky, a man who simply could not abide finding himself in debt to another, wanted to insist, the barman began to take offence. Suddenly he asked us to write something as a souvenir on the marble-topped table, if only to testify that the very first Russian military guests had visited his bar.

"Write your names and the date—the day and the hour. The best sportsmen in the world appear at this stadium, but a plane has never landed here before. That's also a record."

The marble top of the table already bore, written in ink, the inscription: "I affirm that I landed behind this table on 9 May 1945, at 7.15", followed by the scrawling signature: "Captain A. Sevastyanov". I wondered what to write for these fine, hospitable lads who had given us such a warm, cordial welcome, but I could not gather my thoughts together. They scattered like cockroaches in the light. In the end I could think of nothing except: "I affirm the same. Lieutenant-Colonel Polevoi". Then my head seemed to sink onto the table of its own accord and my eyes closed, but through my sleep I again could hear the tireless Krushinsky chatting with the people in the bar, getting the details of a curious local legend which states that real freedom will only come to Czechia when a Russian Cossack waters his horse in the Vltava.

1968-1977

GRIGORI BAKLANOV

It Was the Month of May

It was May, the sixth day after the war had ended. We were quartered in a German village: four reconnaissance officers and myself, their superior. In the village, which was so unlike any of ours, there were twelve sturdy little houses with scrupulously cleanswept cellars, their floors sprinkled with sand. In these cellars stood barrels of cold apple cider and in the farm-yards were chickens, rosy pigs and heavy-breathing Dutch cows in their stalls. Behind the houses, in the well-manured fields, grain was growing. And all of this was lit up by the peaceful May sun: the grain in the little fields and the red tile of the roofs; the blushing pigs and the masters of the houses who exchanged cordial bows each morning. They somehow accepted peace almost immediately, without discussion or debate. For them it seemed so easy, as if they had only to take off their army boots and put on their felt house-slippers, those very same slippers they had taken off six years ago in order to put on their army boots. These people didn't like to talk about the war. Instead they would simply shake their heads in a sort of criticism and mention Hitler's name: it was he who was responsible for everything, so let him answer for it. As for them, they took off their boots.

Two days after peace had been declared we caught a German officer in the grain fields behind the houses. He stood in our midst, tall in his shiny black officer's coat with its velvet collar. And we, having captured him, for the first time didn't know what to do with him. As I looked at him standing there, slightly hunching his straight shoulders beneath his coat, I suddenly felt the relativeness of many human ideas: yesterday he was the enemy, but now that was no longer true. He was not even a prisoner, but we were still not used to the idea of simply letting him go free.

Grigori Baklanov (B. 1923)—Soviet prose writer and State Prize winner. In 1941 he volunteered for the front, where he served as a private in the artillery, then commanded a platoon, and finally became the head of artillery battalion intelligence. He took part in the liberation of Romania, Hungary and Austria.

Baklanov became known as a writer mainly thanks to his books about the war: the stories *South of the Main Strike* (1957, *An Inch of Land* (1959), *The Dead Cannot Be Shamed* (1961), *Forever Nineteen* (1981), *The Youngest of the Brothers* (1982), and the novels *July Forty-One* (1964), *Friends* (1975), and others.

The short story "It was the Month of May" (1962) narrates the tragic story of those who became victims of terror, revealing the profound amorality and criminality of the Nazi order.

I remember the July of 1941. We were retreating and many had already been killed. But when we captured a German and saw that he had the large hands of a worker, we would slap him on the back and sort of sympathise with him, that Hitler had made him, a worker, to become a soldier and had forced him to fight against us. We even fed him from our own pot. That's the way it was in the beginning of the war. And now the war was over, and here before us, stood a German lance-corporal, caught in the grain fields and none of us could bring ourselves to give him a self-assuring slap on the back. We couldn't say to each other as other soldiers after other wars had undoubtedly said: "You're a soldier, and I'm a soldier, and neither of us is to blame. Those who are guilty are those who ordered us to shoot each other. Let them answer for everything." But now there was something else between us; the guilt and responsibility of each for this war was now measured by a different standard.

But it seemed that the villagers and the master of the house in which I was quartered didn't feel like this. Mornings, when I was having my breakfast, having hung my gun in its holster on the end of the wooden bed, my host would come in and, with his pipe between his teeth, would greet me as "Herr Offizier". At first he would stop in the doorway to say this, but soon, after a couple of days, he was already sitting, legs crossed, at the table with me. The morning sun slanted through the window and, squinting at me, he would suck on his pipe, its lid blackened by nicotine, and would watch with pleasure as "Herr Offizier" ate. He, too, was once young, and understood why a young man would have such a healthy appetite in the morning. His half-closed eyes shone with complacency. My host's wife could be heard bustling about in the courtyard, her enamelled milk pail ringing. She was eighteen when she bore him a son and now, at thirty-two, she didn't look at all like the mother of that tall (he was half a head taller than his father) skinny offspring. We even thought, at first, that he wasn't her son, but his from a previous marriage.

The very first day of my stay with them, my host asked my permission to take his wife to another village to stay overnight with their relatives; she was a young woman, and there were soldiers here... He said that his son would stay behind, so that I would not have any doubts as to his motives. He was leaving all his property with us: his cows, and his pigs, and of course I didn't question for a second why he would want his son to spend the night in the house.

They left when the sun was setting, and the youngster

jingled his keys in the sheds and barns until darkness fell. We paid no attention to him. My men gathered in the courtyard, and watching the sunset, sang about the Cossack who galloped off to war. And this song, which we had heard hundreds of times before, tugged at our hearts in a special way here, in Germany.

Early the next morning, while it was still cool, our hosts returned. He came immediately to bid "Herr Offizier" a good morning and she went straight to the farm-yard. She dashed about, mixing feed for the pigs with her full, rosy hands, those hands that did everything, while my men were sprawled lazily in the courtyard, sunning themselves. The mistress was rushing from the cowshed to the house and back, giving off the smell of the pigsty, fresh milk and warm perspiration. Occasionally, she would dart a glance and brush the edge of her skirts against one of the men. As she stood, hands on hips, in the pigsty, and the pigs, crowding the trough and squealing, rubbed against her bare legs which were planted firmly apart, she, with her strong hips and powerful form, her preoccupied face like that of a well-fed infant, seemed, among the bustling pigs, a monument to satiety and satisfaction. Our host, however, was a gnarled and wiry man, with thin shoulders and large wrists and a pipe in his mouth that never went out. But, behind that loosened gait, beneath that homey appearance there lurked a carefully-hidden military bearing.

And so it was that morning. He sat at the table as I breakfasted, engaged in guarded conversation with me. I looked at him over the rim of my glass, and I wanted to go home so badly, as if it were a hundred years and not just six days that we had been quartered in this clean little German village, spared from the destruction of the war by some miracle of fate. There was just one thing good about today, and that was a new motorcycle that stood waiting for me in the yard. My men had brought it in this morning and I had yet to see it.

At that moment Magda went past the window, clutching a wet oaken tub to her stomach, her face as immobile as that of an old woman, her steely arms bare to the elbow. On her feet Magda wore short, hobnailed soldiers' boots. She had been working for our hosts since fall. And it seemed that, of the entire village, Magda was the only one for whom peace had not yet come, just as it was true that no future would ever come for her. Everything that she had had was left in the past, and she, with her iron constitution, would go on to live for quite a while yet.

Magda had had a husband, a Communist. Someone had stabbed him to death, in the back, at a meeting. She had had

a son, her only, who was born late to her. With him she had lived out a second life, already not her own, but his. And he had been killed in 1944 at the front.

Margoslin, the commander of the intelligence sector, not quite awake, barefoot and his tunic unbelted, came up to Magda and grabbed hold of the tub. Magda refused to loosen her grip and for a few minutes the two of them stood in the middle of the yard, each pulling the tub toward oneself. Margoslin finally won and carried the tub off easily on his shoulder. Magda followed after him, her face dark in spite of the sunny day. And thus they both disappeared behind the barn.

I have never seen any of my men attempt to help any of our hosts: neither the mistress of the house who was blessed with such luxurious virtues, nor her son. The only one they felt any pity for was Magda, an old woman who had lost everything in the war and had to work for those who not only lost nothing but who, it seemed, even acquired something.

I finished my fried eggs right from the pan and poured myself a second glass of wine. The wine was light, transparent, straight from the cellar, and the empty glass with my wet fingerprints stood covered with a thin film of cold perspiration for a while yet. I rose, put on my shoulder-belt (our host watched me deferentially at that moment), and tightened my wide officer's belt. I sensed my every muscle, and it was a special pleasure to feel the weight of the pistol on my hip. I put on my officer's cap and went out into the yard. Even after having fought in a war such as this one, a man of twenty-two is still very young, if such trivial things as these could be so important, and what is more, that they are seen by a German.

After the cold wine, the sun in the yard was blinding and there, under the window, against the white wall, shining in all its bluish-black enamelled and nickelled splendour, stood my new motorcycle. I maneuvered the motorcycle vibrating from the running motor out of the courtyard, and had hardly put my foot down on the pedals when it took off. The country road rushed along, swiftly spreading out to meet us. I tore ahead, flying toward the blue wall of the sky and I understood that, indeed, the war had ended and that we were in Germany. All of this was for those who didn't make it this far. I pushed the gas pedal all the way down and felt a cold wind in my teeth and an iciness in my heart that wouldn't melt: the sharp, cold pain of life.

Beyond the hill was another village where Volodya Yakovenko, the commanding reconnaissance officer of our other group was quartered. He also had four men under him.

Using my feet to help, I made my way up the rocky incline in the forest and then to the top of the hill. From there, with a deafening roar, shooting fumes from the exhaust pipe, the motorcycle lunged into the street. Trees, the shutters on the houses, the front gardens—all of this fused together through a film of tears into bright, sunlit ribbons standing still along both sides of the road.

Up ahead there was a fork in the road, in the midst of which lay a heap of cabblestones. To get to Yakovenko I had to take the right branch. And at that very minute, when I had already begun my turn, slanting my body to the angle of the motorcycle, a little puppy darted into the street from behind a house and headed straight for my front wheel. Everything happened instantaneously, my hands went to work before I was conscious of what was going on. I managed somehow to turn to one side and slam on the brakes. I was thrown out of the seat and on to the ground where I rolled through the dust and tried to stop myself by grabbing at the earth with my hands. Coming to a stop, I feverishly lept to my feet. A little boy of about three stood by the house, holding the puppy in his arms. The boy didn't try to run away, but just stood looking at me with terror in his big round eyes and clutching the puppy with all his might to his chest.

My trousers got snapped at the knees from hitting the ground and blood flowed from my raw and dusty palms. The now crumpled motorcycle lay on the pile of cobblestones, its back wheel spinning aimlessly. I sat down on a rock, my legs trembling. I dazedly spat the dirt from my mouth, and a very definite thought entered my shocked mind: "I could have been killed, just like that. And with the war over..." Just then Yakovenko's men came running up. They carried me home in pieces: me, and separately my cap, which one of the men had found on the opposite side of the street.

While they took off my boots, Yakovenko stood to one side, a glass of vodka in his hand.

"Here, drink this," he said. "Everything in one piece? Well, boys, nothing broken?"

They felt my head with their fingers.

"Does this hurt? How about this? No? Ok, go ahead, drink up."

After the men had left, Yakovenko sat down on the bed next to me. It was only then that I noticed that his face was like that of a sick man. He smelt of vodka.

"Know what?" he said. "I've been to a concentration camp. It turns out there was a camp three kilometres from here. I made a trip out there yesterday."

He wiped his forehead with his palm.

I knew that his father, a commissar in a tank division, had been killed in 1941 outside of Kiev. Two years later, a man came to their house and told Yakovenko's mother that he had been imprisoned in the same camp in Germany as her husband and that he had managed to escape. Yakovenko's father was unable to run and asked this man to tell his family that he was still alive. Yakovenko's mother wrote all of this to her son at the front, not knowing whether to believe it or not.

Ever since then Yakovenko had harboured a secret hope that when we got to Germany he would find out about his father. And the closer was the end of the war, the more impatient became this hope.

And yesterday he saw the concentration camp for the first time. He followed that same path, from the gates and to the crematorium, which was soaked in the blood of those hundreds of thousands of martyrs who had walked it before him. He already understood that even if there was a trace of his father among the traces of those who had disappeared forever, no-one would ever be able to tell him about it.

"There's a ditch there. Behind the crematorium." He suddenly went very pale. "There's flies buzzing above it. Green flies... At first I didn't understand... But I felt terrified for some reason. It was the smell probably... There's human fat there, in the ditch. They burned people and it ran off there..."

He rocked back and forth, grasping his bent knees with his hands.

"You know," he said, "I've got just one hope. My father was a commissar. And they didn't take commissars prisoner. And then, that guy said that in the camp my father's name was listed as Yakovlev. Not Yakovenko, but Yakovlev. Maybe this guy confused my father with someone else. My mother never saw him again."

What could I say to him? I said that it was very possible, and almost for certain, and that I myself knew of a couple of similar incidents. For example, in our regiment, when we were braking out of a encirclement...

Yakovenko sat, swaying slightly, his eyes closed, the lower half of his face white, his temples and forehead flushed and bathed in sweat.

That night, awakening suddenly, I saw a broad shadow on the ceiling above my head; a pair of shoulders the size of the entire ceiling with a head stretched out above them. Propping his head up, his temples on his fists, Yakovenko was sitting at the table, two candles in a dish lighting up his face from below. Hearing that I wash't asleep, he came

up to my bed, his bare feet in slippers, in his breeches and unbelted shirt, and sat down next to me.

"They told me there that ashes ... the ashes of those who were burned, were carted out onto the roads. They fertilised the fields with those ashes."

He rubbed his throat. His mouth was dry and so was his voice.

"When I got back here I asked them: 'Did you know about this?' 'Nichts, nichts.' We didn't know, they said. 'Then go and look for yourselves'." His broad neck was flushed. "They won't go. They don't want to go. See? They were burning people right next door. They fertilised the fields with their ashes. And now they eat that bread."

He stood up guickly and the candles flickered, the shadows of his hands ran along the wall to the shelf. Yakovenko took a little object down from the shelf and turned it, tag side up, to the light. "See?" The tag was in French. In the quivering candlelight all kinds of little objects, each strangely alien to the other, looked down at us from the knick-knack shelf and the walls. These were things from various families, families who had never known each other, who had spoken different languages; collected together were things belonging to people who were probably now long gone. In the farm-yard there were cows from Holland and pigs from Denmark. And a few kilometres from here, a concentration camp.

The next day I couldn't bring myself to look at the fields. "They fertilised the fields with ashes..." I still didn't want to believe it. I already knew how easy it was, if one wished, to condemn all after having condemned one or two. But they had all remained silent: those who knew, and those who had guessed, and even those who had disapproved.

We came down the hill and the soldier who was driving the cart tugged on the reins and held the horses in. I was lying in the hay, the sun was shining and I could smell the sweat of the overheated horses. Through the slats of the wagonside the fields stretched out behind us. And on the porous and ash-grey earth rose the young and slightly dusty grain. It shone lushly, gathering its strength. And I couldn't look at the earth, at the grain.

In the idyllic blue German sky pure and shiny white clouds floated by. Their shadows skimmed weightlessly over the earth. Peace and quiet. But, how many more people in this new peace would have to resurrect the dead and bury them once more? And how few lucky ones would see alive those whom they thought already buried!

We entered the street and turned in at the farm yard.

The driver turned the horses quickly back, he was in a hurry, and I went off towards the house. None of my men were in the yard and our hosts, catching sight of me, disappeared in the cowshed and began whispering there furiously. Their worried faces peeked out from there a few times. Something had happened while I had been gone.

I sat down on the bench and stretched out my leg which hurt to bend. I wanted to smoke. But I had on Yakovenko's dark blue breeches and I had forgotten to put my lighter in his pocket. My host was already heading toward me. I wet my finger and started to rub the spit on my belt which had gotten scratched on one side.

My host was even more cordial than usual. Seeing the cigarette in my hand, he immediately, but in no real hurry, offered me a light, as he would offer a good friend. He then sat down on the bench next to me, man to man.

Still lighting up I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, our hostess running off to the pigsty. Her face was angry, but at the same time frightened and prepared for humiliation. My host noticed nothing. He sat, smoking his pipe, and the sun shone on both of as we sat beneath the window. Meanwhile, his son was approaching us, a notebook and pencil in his hands. He stopped in front of me, holding the open notebook in front of his face, and coughed, as if preparing to sing. I looked up at him. When he began to speak, his shoulders dropped and he stretched his neck forward in anxiety.

He spoke quickly and I caught the meanings of only a few separate German words. But he insistently repeated it again and again, and I finally understood. It turned out that, in my absence, one of my men had shot a pig.

"Erschoss,"* he repeated, showing how it had been done.

Across the yard, radiant in his new leather jacket, strolled Margoslin, swaying slighly. He had obviously come to "reconnoitre", and he carried himself rather disinterestedly. The boy didn't see him. His face flushed from agitation as he said: "It was a good pig. It weighed thirty kilograms and could have grown even more. But there was already thirty kilograms of good-quality pork there. And every kilogram costs..."

He had already said the word "kostet"** a few times. I remembered that German word from my childhood. I knew a little rhyme with that word: *"Guten Tag, Frau Meier! Was kosten die Eier?—Acht Pfennig.—Acht Pfennig? Das ist zu teuer..."****

* He shot it, shot it.
** It costs (Germ.)—*Ed.*
*** Good day, Frau Meier! How much are the eggs? Eight pfennigs. Eight pfennigs? That's too much... (Germ.)—*Ed.*

During the war there was an SS General Mayer, a butcher and sadist.

Tucking his legs under the bench and propping himself with his hands on either side of his body, my host started to rock slightly. He hunched up his bony shoulders and his head disappeared into them. All this time he said not a word, just listened with closed eyes, nodding his smoking pipe. I glanced at his hands, at the fingers which were grasping the edge of the bench. They were large worker's hands. Something black got into their creases and around their large nails. Was it dirt? Ashes?

My host nodded his pipe, and his son calculated for me again and again what had been already calculated by the whole family. I was to be convinced, and to see for myself, that I was not being cheated, that they were going to charge me a moderate price for the good pork. His nose grew pale and his hands moved jerkily. Drawing his notebook closer to his face, the boy read out the name of the man who had shot the pig. "Soldat Makarúshka", and looked at me. I didn't understand at first that the difficult to pronounce and strange-sounding phrase "zoldat Makarúshka" was in reality Makárushka, the youngest of my men.

He had come to us in a liberated Ukrainian village, and had come straight to me, the first officer he met. Barefoot, wild and hungry, which was obvious by the look in his eyes, he asked us to take him with us to the front. In this village no-one knew him; he had appeared in the spring, before the snow had completely disappeared, and was then barefoot as well, his knees, blue from the cold, showing through his tattered trousers. The women of the village thought him slightly daft and, feeling sorry for him, often fed him. He wasn't sent off to Germany for that very same reason.

He got used to the other reconnaissance men immediately, but for a long time afterwards, when talking about one thing or another, he would refer to us as "Russians", as the Germans had done. And when talking about the Germans, he would call them "residents of the occupied territories". He was as quiet and inoffensive now as before and, after he was well fed, very strong physically. I don't remember who was the first to christen him with the name Makarushka, but it was perfect for him: a stocky, healthy, timid young man. After that everyone called him Makarushka, and no-one remembered what his real name was. Once, when we were sitting together at the observation point, he told me a little about himself. He was from a partisan village. Almost all the men from the village had gone into the forest, including his father. But, for some reason the Germans left the families

alone for a long time and didn't try to exact any revenge. Then one night they made a raid on the village. All of the villagers were rounded up in the school, the doors nailed shut and the building set on fire. Those who tried to escape through the windows were shot. Makarushka's mother perished in that inferno. However, despite the fact that the raid came so suddenly, many mothers were able to hide their children. Some of the villagers tried to escape by hiding as well. The Nazis later raided cellars and basements and at night led out those who were found to be shot. Makarushka was carrying his two-year old sister in his arms. At the edge of a ravine they were ordered to line up. Makarushka could not forgive himself for one thing: that at that last minute he held his sister in his arms. "I should have put her down on the ground. She was little, she would have gotten lost in the shuffle, perhaps no-one would have noticed her. It was nighttime after all, dark. But she was so scared, she clung to me and wouldn't let go. She had such little nails and she stuck them so tightly around here—" he pointed to his neck. And I understood then that no matter how long he might live he would always feel his little sister's nails as they stuck in his neck, her little body sensing impending death.

"It could have grown even more"—said our host's son about the pig that weighed thirty kilograms. It was *his* pig and no-one had the right to illegally shoot it. And his father in his house-slippers, seated on the bench, nodded his smoking pipe.

I looked up at the boy. He was fourteen and his voice still cracked occasionally, it hadn't changed yet. He was as old as Makarushka had been when they took him with his two-year old sister in his arms to be shot, when he, later that night, crawled out of the common grave and into the forest where, like an animal, he healed his wounds with various herbs.

This boy at fourteen had never seen hard times, but he already knew how much good pork costs, and what you could get for it. And standing before me, a bill of sale in his hand, he was confident that he had every right to present us with that bill.

That evening we ate the pork. Our hosts, as was their usual custom at that time, left us alone, quite displeased. They didn't look us in the eye, and our hostess' cheeks were red and swollen from tears. Only their son, the young manager, still busied himself around the house.

Behind the farm and beyond the neatly-kept fields the sun was setting in its cramped quarters, breaking off its rays on the sharp edges of the roofs. The bright sunset light quiv-

ered in the clear air, but it was already dusk in the room.

Just then I heard the gate bang. Then came the sound of unfamiliar shuffling steps. I could see only a part of the yard from my window. I waited, and as I did a man entered my field of vision. He was utterly exhausted, and dragged one leg, but walked through the yard so that I understood he had already been here before. Coming up to the pigsty he glanced into its dark depths. He didn't notice the host's son watching him from behind the woodpile. The boy came forward, ready to shout at him, but suddenly something changed in his face: he recognised the man.

The footsteps were now heard on the porch. The curtain on the window cut his body in half and I could see only his feet in their worn-out shoes as he came up the stairs. It obviously was painful for him to step on his right foot: barely putting any weight on it, he immediately hopped onto his healthy leg and dragged the injured foot behind.

He couldn't find the door handle immediately and for a few minutes I could hear his heavy breathing on the other side. The door finally opened and he crossed over the threshold. He was an old man dressed in greyish, almost colourless clothes that were apparently not his own as they hung loosely on him. He glanced about the room and once more it seemed to me that he had been here before.

"Hello," I said to him from the darkness of the room.

He shuddered and quickly turned around, a sort of terrified expression in his eyes. But it wasn't fright. Having made out who was in front of him, he took off his round camp cap.

"*Dzien dobry, Pan Tovarzicz*!"

And, having trouble finding the Russian words, he, helping himself with various gestures, pointed to the room with a sweep of his hand:

"Is... Pan Rashke home? *Nach Haus*?"

"Yes, he's home. But he's not here right now", I said loudly for some reason, as if that would make the Russian easier for him to understand. I too resorted to gestures. "But, usually he's here. *Hier*."

"Hier", he repeated and thanked me, "*Dzienkuje*. Thank you, *tovarishch*."

I pulled out a heavy oaken chair for him.

"Please, sit down."

"*Dzienkuje bardzo. Mnie czeba Pana Rashke zobaczyc*."

He sat down, revealing his skinny knees. I could now see, up close, that he was not an old man, but simply a very worn out one, with sunken cheeks and a grey, bloodless face.

"He'll come back," I said.

Makarushka brought the frying pan in. It was filled with juicy pieces of fried pork and potatoes fried in the pork fat. It was hot, sizzling, fragrant, and the aroma unnerved the hungry man.

I dismissed Makarushka, took half the meat from the pan and some potatoes, put them on a plate and pushed it towars our guest. I saw a look of terror in his eyes as he glanced at the pork.

"*Nic, nic*", he shook his head.

"Go ahead, eat. Eat." I insisted. "They'll bring me more in a minute."

But he pushed the plate away with a weak hand. I didn't understand and gave in. I poured him some wine. He thanked me with his eyes and drank greedily: he was thirsty. His temples puffed in and out and on the one hand which held the glass you could clearly see his wrist. It was nothing but a bracelet of tendons and bones which radiated out towards his fingers. It was frightening to watch his hairy Adam's apple, enormous because of this thinness, as it bobbed up and down as he drank.

He began to cough, not having finished the wine, and coughed for a long time and painfully, turning blue from the rush of blood. Then, weak from that effort, and with tears in his eyes, he fought to get his breath, his hands trembling.

"Did you use to live here?", I asked, seeing how awkward he found his own weakness. "Do you know this house?"

He looked at me with the same look that deaf-mutes have when they try to read lips to understand what is being said.

"Do you understand Russian?"

"*Tak, tak*," he nodded. "*Rozumije. Po malu*"

"I said, did you use to live here?"

"*Tak*," he said. And shook his head no.

It suddenly seemed to me that he was not entirely in his right mind: he had that kind of eyes. Once more he glanced about the room.

"I'm a Pole," he said. And he looked at me. Then he repeated: "I'm a Pole," explaining in that one phrase his position here, the position of a man forcibly deported to Germany.

"My wife... *Ma zenka byla tutaj*. Here." He pointed out the window to the cowshed. It was a great effort for him to raise his hand. "And my son... When he was born, he cried and my wife covered his mouth. Like this..." and he covered his own mouth with his hand. And when that skinny hand hid the lower half of his face, his eyes became even bigger

than before. So much suffering was contained in them. "So that no-one would hear anything. *Ale schovac mozne tylko martvego.* Only the dead... Once she was breastfeeding him *mlekim... Do obora*", seeing that I didn't understand, he pointed to the cowshed. "There, *do obora vszed nimec. Nic nie rzekl.* He didn't say anything. He just looked *na dziecko*, at my son, *jak ego karmi mlekim.* She couldn't tell me just how he looked, she just cried and shook... she shook as she spoke. *Co moglem zrobic? Co?** I was working for another German there, in another village, *ale co moglem zrobic?* I was helpless".

His lips, dry, grey as if from the cold, moved slowly. In the early dusk the light from the window shone glassily in his motionless eyes. His gaze was turned inward.

"I can see now, how he looked at her. He would feed her so that she could work, but the baby sapped her strength. After that she used to hide the baby when she went to the fields. *Mowi, co uslichala jego krzik...* his cry. I think she heard that cry in her heart all the time. She came running from the field when she heard the baby crying, *nasze dzeicko krzicalo.* And the pigsty," he pointed to it, unable to find the word. "A board... Do you understand?" "It was locked with a board? Closed from the outside?"

"Yes. She felt something and opened it. She went in and ... a lot of pigs. When..."

Once more he motioned with his hands and I guessed what it was:

"She pushed aside the pigs?"

"Right, right... And she saw our little boy. *Ot tego czasu vidzala tylko to.*** When she became completely mad and couldn't work any more, the German took her off *do obozu...* To the camp, understand? *Tam bylo krematorium, Nie viedzala, dokad jeju provodzono...* Where they were taking her. She was lucky that way."

In the dusky light it was difffcult to see his face. All you could see were shadows where his cheeks should be and the gleam of his eyes in their deep sockets. From the yard came the sound of my men singing softly.

"I spent a year and a half in the camp and survived. So as to come back here..."

I recalled how our host's son had looked at the Pole from behind the woodpile. I went to the window and called to Margoslin. The song broke off abruptly and I could hear his leather jacket slightly creaking as he approached. Margoslin stopped beneath the window and looked up.

"Bring the boy here," I ordered.

Once more the leather jacket creaked off into the dusk.

* What could we do? What (—Pol.)—*Ed.*

** Since then she saw only that (—Pol.)—*Ed.*

You could hear voices, footsteps in the yard, beyond the sheds and around the house.

It was completely dark in the room now, the only light came from the two windows and the mirror which hung in the dark corner.

"*Tam komora.* There was a big room there. These hands built it."

He held up his hands and looked at them.

"They drove the people there. Women and children. The children had their toys with them. They told them it was a bath-house. So the people went. The children, too. And there,"—he pointed to the ceiling—"such a little window. Gas came out of there. Gas... My Katerina didn't understand where they were taking her. She was lucky. *Taka mloda**. She's right here. And there. Everywhere."

Once again I saw the spark of madness flash in his eyes. But at the same time he was completely sane.

I asked the Pole whether or not he knew the village where our host was going to spend the night, and could he come with us there. We now sat and waited in silence.

Margoslin finally came back. The boy was nowhere to be found, just as I had expected.

The four of us, the Pole, Margoslin, Makarushka and myself made our way through the forest. The moon, rising only half-way above us, couldn't break free of the jagged hills. It was huge and rusty-bronze, and the hill in front of it was black. It finally broke free and shot up into the sky, rising ever higher, and getting ever smaller. And when it was already high in the sky, we saw the village bathed in the white moonlight which magically transforms the night world. We could see the dark bluish walls of the houses, the damp slant of the tile roofs and the gleaming glass of the dark windows. We approached the village from behind. Out of the farmyards wafted the sleepy and stagnant smell of warm cattle-sheds and urine, and from below came the sensation of fresh dampness. There, under the overhanging bushes a dark rivulet flowed gleamingly along the stones. A row of stone steps, wet from the dew, led down to the water.

Two of us kept an eye on the house and shed while the other two crept quietly into the empty courtyard which seemed cleanswept in the moonlight. We climbed up a wooden staircase into the hayloft. Below us a dog, already hoarse from barking, tugged so furiously at the chain that it made her fall on its back. No light went on in any of the windows, no door was opened.

There, on the hay, side by side, were two featherbeds which still bore the crumpled traces of bodies. We searched

* So young (Pol.)—*Ed.*

every corner of the shed, house and yard with our flashlights. But those for whom we were looking were not to be found. They didn't appear the next day either. Only later did we learn that they had escaped to the West. All three of them.

The villagers said that they were bad people. Some even said that he was a Nazi. Or his brother was a Nazi. It was only now that they spoke about it.

"Why didn't you say that earlier?"

They shrugged their shoulders.

"We were afraid."

Only Magda said nothing about them, neither good nor bad. She didn't speak at all. For a while after she continued to come, as always in the morning. She fed the pigs, swept the yard, milked the cows; carried out all her responsibilities whose mechanical fulfillment formed her ties to life. And the milk would stand in the buckets and go sour.

Nowadays our hosts probably recall those days in May as black days in their lives. The boy was only fourteen then, and his voice still cracked. It was like that for many. By now his voice has changed.

But during those first few days of peace, a fourteen-year-old skinny German boy stood in front of me, a bill of sale in his hand. I can see him even now, his pale nose, his face flushed with agitation. He wasn't interested in the past, he didn't want to know anything about it. He only wanted what he was owed for the pork. And he was quite confident of his right to present me with that bill.

1962, 1975

LEV SLAVIN

A Trip to Zerbst

Lev Slavin (1896-1984)—Soviet prose writer, playwright and the author of the novels *The Heir* (1930), *Ardennes Passions* (1976), the plays *Intervention* (1932), stories and memoirs.

During the war Slavin worked as a correspondent for front-line and national newspapers. His short story *A Trip to Zerbst* (1945) is based on his impressions of a provincial German town during the first days after the war. He describes details of daily life and the local residents in a pungent, sarcastic style.

It was late when we arrived in Zerbst. The low-hanging sun coloured everything yellow, a sort of that bright analine dye they make at the factories of I. G. Farbenindustrie. The asphalt roadway shone, polished to a dark blue by the passing vehicles, and obsessively swept by the residents of Zerbst three times a day no matter what was going on around them—bombing, a solar eclipse or the surrender of Germany. Sticking up over the fences of front gardens were stumpy, thick-branched birch trees, unlike ours. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, as if it too had been swept clean and washed daily with soapy water and polished with emery. Oh how dismal, this foreign land!

Even the ruined houses, quite numerous here and flooded in that awful yellow lacquer, looked not as if they had been bombed, but as if built by set-designers from Ufa-Film Studios for the next trashy movie like "Germany, the Shepherd of Nations", at which the Germans dislocated their jaws from yawning so terribly.

"Does that name 'Zerbst' remind you of anything?" I asked my travelling companion Captain Savelyev.

He turned to me his snub-nosed Ryazan face covered with the dust of the Brandenburg country roads, and said:

"Sounds like somebody trying to whistle."

I laughed, looking at him.

"The Germans will probably think you're a Senegalese officer from the French army."

"You should not think you're any whiter," he muttered.

We had come all the way from Berlin in an open jeep and the dust had made its way right under our skin. You could feel it grinding in your very insides.

"It was here," I said in an instructive tone, "that the Rus-

sian Empress Catherine the Great was born, nee Princess Anhalt-Zerbst. Listen, Savelyev, this is a wonderful contribution to your collection."

"I'd give up all the empresses in the world, from the Queen of Sheba to the Queen of Madagascar, for a tub of hot water," said Savelyev.

I sighed. We had been dreaming about water like a drunk dreams about vodka, but there was little chance we'd find a bath here. Up until yesterday Zerbst had been in the hands of the allied forces and just this morning the Americans turned it over to the Red Army, in accordance with the plan for the demarcation of Germany.

We did at last managed to wash our hands and faces at the washstand in the courtyard of the military commandant, who had arrived just before us and was still getting settled.

When we came out into the street, Kotya, my driver, told me in a hoarse confidential whisper:

"Comrade Major, I've done some reconnaissance here. You take a walk around and in an hour or so come over there to that crazy-looking tower. You'll have a bath."

"Kotya, boasting does not befit a young man," grumbled Savelyev.

"Savelyev, get your soap ready," I said.

Kotya gave a grateful cough, saluted and plunged off to some ruin of a Teutonic-style building so hideous that even the war damage couldn't make it uglier. Kotya was a reticent young man, uncommonly shy for a driver and extraordinarily efficient. He had one weakness: he loved to appear all-powerful. In our wanderings I never asked Kotya where he had suddenly come up with pheasant for lunch or where he had managed to get four new tires for our jeep in the midst of the burning forests of Pomerania. He wouldn't have told me anyway. He didn't like revealing his technique. He liked having a reputation of a miracle worker. Furthermore, Kotya could announce the most ordinary innocent things in such a significant whisper, opening his eyes wide in panic and looking around to make sure no one was eavesdropping, that even such phrases of his as "It seems I need a shave" or "Comrade Major, shall I fetch your laundry" would take on secretive and even sinister import.

The captain and I walked around town. The residents we passed bowed to us with smiles so sweet that our teeth began to ache. Marzipans, not people.

Passing a small ancient park, pitted all over with slit trenches, we saw Catherine's Palace[1] and stopped short in surprise.

All the guidebooks, including the most recent, described the Princess Zerbst's castle as being well-maintained. The 1943 edition[2] of Baedeker's travel guide emphasised that "the castle has been renovated during the war and in recent years has enriched its collection with new exhibits in the style of the era". It was these new displays that interested me. I strongly suspected that "the new exhibits" were pilfered from Catherine's palaces in Detskoye Selo and Peterhof by agents of the thieving aesthete Alfred Rosenberg.

But just try and make your way into the Zerbst Palace! It had been totally destroyed, and from all indications, quite recently.

"Ruins in the rococo style," Savelyev summed up dismally, "only what I don't understand is whose work it was."

"You can see there was a battle."

"With whom?"

"With the Americans, of course. Who else?"

"But who were the Americans fighting? I know for a fact there were no German units here."

Savelyev was an intelligence officer for the army and like all intelligence officers, he knew the enemy's army better than his own. It was as if he had a card catalogue in his head listing the countless numbers of German units, their movements and the figures on their losses and replacements. He knew the names of the officers of these units, their character, marital status and careers. Moreover, he never wrote anything down, being wary of committing anything to paper. But his athletic memory held hundreds of various facts, all arranged and kept in strict order.

One could not even think of going into the palace. The remaining pillars looked as if they were about to collapse any moment, and the balcony and the marble torso of a muse were hanging on metal rods that reminded one of a taut nerve ready to snap, and could come crashing down on your head.

The garden behind the palace was also all torn up. Bombs had altered the very topography of the surrounding area. Valleys and rises not shown on the map had appeared. The little Nute River had changed its course. Three adjacent craters from half-ton high-explosive bombs had joined to form a large lake, which was not devoid of poetic beauty.

Savelyev, usually so talkative, kept a sullen silence. He was depressed about the scandalous gap in his card catalogue.

From the piles of crumbled stone near the palace I fished out a 16th-century Dutch bible, a pair of women's high galoshes bearing the Krasny Bogatyr* label, and a portrait of

* A shoe factory in Moscow.—*Ed.*

Catherine II—an old engraving printed in St. Petersburg. Apparently all these were part of the "new exhibits in the style of the era".

Savelyev looked disdainfully at my finds from the corner of his eye. He scorned the "souvenirs" which we all hunted after: the iron crosses, bricks from the walls of the Reichstag, the shell fragments that "just missed me", and *the* pen with which Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel had signed Germany's surrender (there were already some forty of these pens and Savelyev said a conference of their owners ought to be called, with Keitel taking part, to determine which was the original).

Savelyev himself collected something different: unique life experiences, funny or critical situations, unusual circumstances. Among his collection you could find the story about the two skin-divers, one German and one ours, locked in mortal combat at the bottom of the Dnieper, or about the "nailgun", a weapon devised by the tram drivers of Odessa to fire bolts, screws and other bits of metal at the Romanians, and many other stories of the same bizarre sort.

In spare moments Savelyev would spin these tales into stories, orally of course, having an aversion for the business of writing. He could tell them very nicely in his expressive, grumbling deep voice.

Then once, giving in to our insistence, he tried writing down his fascinating stories. What came out was boring ccolourless pap. The distance between paper and the person writing on it is no more than 15 centimetres, and yet all the charm of Savelyev's stories, all their fire, depth, elegance and wit were lost in that tiny span. It seems Savelyev's art proceeded from certain qualities unnecessary to a writer—pauses and facial expressions, or maybe his gestures, though they were very few.

"Well, there you go," I said, "just what you need. The Soviet people arrive in the homeland of the Russian empress... A first-rate situation..."

"I know," said Savelyev sourly, "but it's not for me. I'm trying my best to tune myself into a romantic mode. Here she was born, the little provincial princess. This same green wall stood before her very eyes. The princess languished. She was intelligent, ambitious and charming. All around, the stuffy atmosphere of a shabby prince's palace. Ceremonious observance of etiquette, but she had to mend her stockings herself, in order to develop domestic virtues, of course, but also because she had only three pairs. And suddenly—marriage. Out of the tiny principality and into the vast expanse of barbarous Russia. But St. Petersburg turned

out to be the most beautiful city of Europe. Her husband an emperor and German. Only, in addition, a drunk, a fool, a libertine and a rowdy. A German hooligan on the Russian throne. And then..."

Savelyev paused. And, taking on inspiration, he suddenly screwed up the big folds of his face into an inimitable grimace, which, for a second, held all the buffoonery, slovenliness and even the dirty pores of a drunk—the entire regale image of the wishy-washy clown of a tsar that was Peter the Third.

"And then," settling his numerous and cooperative facial muscles back into order and coming back to normal, Savelyev continued, "officers in love, intrigues and money from London, a palace plot, the hooligan is bumped off. And the little provincial becomes the ruler of an empire. For half a century the world is filled with talk of her fame: the genius of Suvorov[3], her friendship with Voltaire, the conquest of the Crimea[4]. And somewhere far away to the West is her homeland—tiny Zerbst, mother of the ugly duckling—to which the empress never once gave a thought throughout the rest of her long brilliant life. And now, after 200 years, at 7 p.m. the first Russians—Soviet officers—have appeared in Zerbst.

"Good, good!" I said.

"It's not for me," said Savelyev, "more like for one of those banal historical novels they've started cooking up for every possible anniversary date. I would never take it for my collection. Let's go back to town."

We walked along the main street which was packed with stores. Huge signboards, little stores. But only the best. Deluxe barber shops, deluxe beer halls, deluxe shoeshines. And everywhere, upon spotting us: "Gentlemen, it was here in our town that your great empress was born."

It was impossible to drink a glass of lousy lemonade in a cafe, or ask for a match from a passerby without hearing that phrase, pronounced with that awful nasal twang and in that particularly exultant tone.

And in all the shop windows portraits of Catherine, some even done up in red ribbon. Apparently, Zerbst really considered Catherine its major speciality.

"You know, we're not just some Magdeburg, Wittenburg or Dessau," the owner of a barrel shop (also deluxe) told us.

"What then?" we asked imprudently.

"Kathryn die Grosse was born here."

The devil take it! For sure, this tiny little town really imagined itself to be the supplier of emperors.

"I dare say," continued the "deluxe" barrel-maker,

"that as a fellow-countryman of Catherine the Great I can expect special attention on the part of the Soviet Command."

"Like what?" pursued Savelyev.

"Like a larger ration of margarine and grain."

"Of course," Savelyev ensured him, "only under one condition: if you prove that you personally raised Catherine the Great for the Russian throne."

We stopped in at a beer hall to wet our throats. The owner greeted us with a courtly bow.

"Gentlemen," he began, bursting with pride, "it was here in our town that..."

"I know, I know," shouted Savelyev. "*Tsaritsa-matushka, Kaiserin-Mutterchen.* I'm sick of hearing about Catherine. Tell me something about Adolf instead."

Tired out, we made our way to the tower. Steam was pouring gaily out of the embrasures of that Teutonic monstrosity. I looked at Savelyev triumphantly.

There had been a laundry here, abandoned a few days ago by its fleeing owner, a prominent local Nazi. It was a dirty hovel full of spiders and wood lice.

But there stood a large stove with a built-in boiler. Three German soldiers had washed the sooty walls, hauled bath-tubs and basins from deserted apartments, built benches for those who wanted a steam-bath, and there it was—a great bath house.

What a great delight it was to dip our exhausted dusty bodies into the hot water.

We lay in the hot water, our eyes closed, feeling our worn-out soldier's bones limbering up.

Savelyev's bath-tub wasn't quite his size and first his head would come poking out and then his long Don Quixotian legs. Soon the water didn't seem hot enough and I shouted:

"Bitte, etwas warmes Wasser!"*

"This very second," answered one of the Germans in perfect Russian.

Savelyev and I looked at him in surprise. He was an elderly man with a grizzly stubble on his chin, but strong; he was briskly moving about the bath house on his short little legs.

"How do you know Russian?" I asked.

"I lived in Russia till 1922," he said, pouring water into the bath. "Not too hot?"

"No, it's fine," I said and thought to myself: "Probably a descendant of the German colonists."

Savelyev stood up and began to wash, oohing and ahing in delight.

* More hot water, please.(Ger.)—*Ed.*

"So what was your profession in Russia?" he asked in his grumbling tone.

"I was a professor at Tomsk University, Captain Sir. I have a doctorate in history. Klaus Voss at your service."

There's a bath-house attendant for you!

Kotya got dressed and whispered hoarsely in my ear:

"I'll go over to the mess tent and figure out some dinner."

And he moved off with the look of a conspirator.

Savelyev wiped the soap off his face to get a better look at the unusual German. The other two, both young lads, squatted near the wall taking turns sucking on a cigarette end, indifferent to the conversation which they couldn't understand.

"How come you left Russia?" Savelyev asked.

"In 1922, repatriation was declared. As a German I went to Germany."

"And what's your field of specialisation?"

"Roman and Greek literature and history. Shall I scrub your back?"

Savelyev's shrewd, slightly squinting eyes had already lit up with thought and mischief as it always was whenever he came across an unusual situation.

"And this certainly is out of the ordinary," I thought to myself. "But maybe he's lying."

And dragging up remnants of my classical education, I exclaimed:

"*Aurea prima sata est, aetas quae vindice nullo, Sponte sua sine lege fidem rectumque colebat...*"

"*...Poena metusque aberant. Nec verba menacio fixo, Aere legebantur...*"* Professor Voss picked up where I left off. "Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*."

Obviously he wasn't lying. He scanned the verse correctly, observing the hiatus, rhymes and all the rest.

"Would you mind if I in turn posed a question?" asked the scholar-prisoner, and meeting with no objections said: "Is my old teacher, Academician Zhebelev still alive? You know, I graduated from Petrograd University."

Indeed, coming through in his speech was a pure and refined Leningrad accent. Also, his phrases were marked by a certain bookishness and unnaturalness, that lifeless correctness with which most foreigners usually speak Russian.

"Zhebelev passed away," I said.

"Sergei Aleksandrovich is dead? Oh dear, dear... Such a name in Europe... I'm sorry to hear it. And Professor Joseph Abgarovich Orbeli?"

"Orbeli is alive and well."

"I'm heartily glad. That's the news to rejoice..." said the

* *The first millennium was the age of gold:*
Then living creatures trusted one another:
People did well without the thought of ill:
Nothing forbidden in a book of laws,
No fears, no prohibitions read in bronze..."
Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, Book I, N.Y., Viking Press, 1958, p. 4.)

Doctor of History, coming over to me and setting to work on my back.

"Please no, thanks, Professor Voss, you really needn't," I said.

"And why not," said Voss, trying to act as a true bathhouse attendant and slapping me across the small of my back, while I tried to evade him. "According to Appianus and confirmed by Gaston Boissier in his work *Promenades archéologiques*, noble patricians in the time of Augustus, gathering in their baths, never denied themselves a beneficial massage. It's an ancient custom, stemming from..."

"But that was Augustus and the patricians."

"Mercy me," said the professor, "I consider it a pleasure to soap the back of a Soviet officer."

But I pushed him away and got out of the bath.

Savelyev had already dried himself off. Still undressed, he sat down on a stool, crossed his legs, and lit a cigarette with great relish. Naked, with his long outstretched limbs and piercing, derisive gaze, he looked like Mephistopheles. His narrow eyes came to rest on Voss with a lively curiosity.

"And so, Professor," he said, "you ended up in the army?"

Voss shook his head remorsefully.

"Yes, the latest stage in my *curriculum vitae**."

"But how did they recruit you? After all, you were, it would seem, already in government service..."

"An ordinary professor of the Reichsuniversität in Poznań. They took me into the army this March in the second total mobilisation."

"I was under the impression that professors were exempt from the draft..."

"It wasn't done quite within the letter of the law," said the Latinist with fervour, "they didn't exactly deal with me according to the rules. It all happened because of the Battle at Cannae. If the gentlemen officers aren't in a hurry, I can tell you how it all came about."

"Go ahead and tell us," said Savelyev and held out his cigarette case to the Germans, who made for it with a suppressed growl of thanks.

"As I've already told you, gentlemen officers," continued the professor, "I read a course in ancient history and literature. You should know that the role of the Numidian cavalry during the Punic Wars was the theme of my dissertation thesis while still at Petrograd University. In short, Cannae was my favourite subject. And at the Reichsuniversität I always devoted at least two ninety-minute lectures to this subject. So it went year after year. Then this winter

* Biography. (Lat.)—*Ed.*

I was called in to see the rector, who informed me that I was making too many modern inferences in my lecture about the Battle at Cannae and that, for instance, likening Carthaginian elephants to today's tanks was, to put it mildly, tactless. When I started to object he cut me off rather sharply, saying that the Battle at Cannae was as awkward a subject as the Grunewald Battle[5], the Battle at Chudskoye Lake[6] or the Battle at Kunersdorf[7], and suggested that I exclude this subject from my course.

"I remember the exact date of that conversation, January 17, 1945. On that day, the Russian troops took Warsaw. Failing to realise the connection between these two battles, so remote from each other in time and space, and not perceiving that Hannibal was as much an enemy of the German idea as Drusus or Germanicus, I considered this persecution of the great Carthaginian unjust and lodged a complaint against the rector with the gauleiter of the province Warteland, Herr Artur Greiser.

"Far from supporting me, the latter angrily declared that the study of Cannae under the present circumstances was nothing less than an oppositional allusion to the 'cauldrons' which the German army had continually been falling into on the Eastern Front since 1943.

"The gauleiter ordered me to be removed from the department of ancient studies and proposed that I teach a course on racial theory. That was January 28, when the Russians broke through into Pomerania. 'Germany doesn't need Latinists,' shouted Herr Greiser irately. Just think, gentlemen officers, this is the same Germany that gave the world the great Niebuhr, Mommsen and Winckelmann!

"I wasn't appeased and, requesting three days off under the pretext of evacuating my family to the southern regions of Bavaria, I travelled to Berlin and wrangled a personal appointment with Reich Minister Joseph Goebbels himself, who had once treated me kindly, praising my historical-political essay 'Machiavelli as the Predecessor of Mussolini', which had been printed in *Politik und Wissenschaft**.

"I set my hopes on the Doctor Goebbels' enlightened mind, encouraged by the fact that in his articles and speeches he often appealed to analogies from ancient classics. The Reich Minister received me in his underground office under the new Reichskanzlei. I stated my problem to him. And he, who had so often likened Hitler to Alaric, Rommel to Scipio Africanus the Younger and himself to Cato the Elder, he who had only recently made a comparison between the present war and the second of the Punic Wars, having listened

* Politics and Science. (Ger.)—*Ed.*

to my complaint, jumped up on the table in a characteristic display of anger and shouted: 'Pomeranian pig! Drone! To the gallows with him!'

"I passed out and when I regained consciousness I found myself lying on the sidewalk of Hermann Goeringstrasse, where the SS personal guard of the Reich Minister dumped me. Here they informed me, as I stood up and brushed the dust off my frock coat, that Doctor Goebbels, in consideration of my age and past services, was kindly allowing me to join the army as a private, in order to atone in blood for my betrayal of the German ideal.

"I resorted to my *ultimo ratio**, and started saying that I agreed to read a course on racial theory, but they gave me a slap and hauled me off to the Warsaw station. In a prison railway car, together with captured deserters and commissary embezzlers, I was conveyed to Poznań. A plot worthy of Suetonius, wouldn't you say?

"On the way I read the latest issue of the newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps*, from which I managed to make out the reason for the rather heightened nervousness of the Reich Minister; on that day, the Russians had crossed the Oder. But in all fairness, gentlemen officers, was that any fault of mine? More like that of the Herr Minister...

"In Poznań they immediately enlisted me as a private in the newly formed *folksgrenadiren* regiment..."

"The 1083rd," put in Savelyev, "formed of three battalions, each armed with up to 80 anti-tank grenades, commander of the regiment Major von Grodenau."

The retired Latinist looked at Savelyev in surprise and said:

"Quite right."

"And you took part in the 14 February battle at Schneidemühl, where your regiment lost three-quarters of its troops..."

"No, Captain Sir," exclaimed the professor, "I was lucky! I didn't take part in the disastrous battle at Schneidemühl, from which I doubt I would have come out alive. I was lucky enough to be assigned to a special detachment sent to replace the garrison in the town of Zerbst, where I now have the great honour of talking to you. The detachment was commanded by Oberlieutenant Koschke..."

"This is where the part I don't know begins," mumbled Savelyev. "Consequently, Professor, you took part in the battles for Zerbst? You fought against the Americans?"

"Oh no, Captain Sir! There weren't any battles for Zerbst."

"I don't understand a thing," said Savelyev. "Why is Zerbst so demolished then? The Americans wouldn't waste

* Last argument. (Lat.)—*Ed.*

their bombs for nothing on this little hole, where there are no military objectives."

"Oh, that's a whole story in itself", said Voss. "If the gentlemen officers would like, I can tell it."

"Tell away," said Savelyev, now settling into an entirely good mood.

"You see, at first everything went well, under the most favourable auspices. Herr Koschke was taken into the army at the same time as myself."

"Again with this Koschke! Can't you just tell us clearly about the battle for Zerbst? If you were this incoherent in telling your students about the Battle at Cannae I can see why Goebbels ran you out of the university."

"But Captain sir," the professor pleaded, "it is Herr Koschke who matters most in this business! Allow me to start from the beginning."

"Alright, go ahead," grumbled Savelyev.

"Herr Koschke was a respectable furniture dealer, a man getting on in years, like myself. And like myself, he never thought of serving in the army. But the second total mobilisation didn't spare anyone and along with the criminal element, a lot of respectable people ended up in our regiment of *folksgrenadiers*. Unlike myself, Herr Koschke was immediately given the rank of Oberlieutenant, even though up until then he had never held a weapon in his hands. But he had powerful connections. His sister-in-law was none other than a housekeeper in the home of Herr Minister Streicher, the imperial custodian of health and racial purity..."

"Stick to the subject, please," said Savelyev impatiently, "you're wandering again."

And here I understood why my friend's fascinating short stories become so cachectic when written down. In writing them he neglects the particulars. On paper there remains only the skeleton of the plot, without the flesh of images, without the blood of epithets, without the colour of details—all of which in his oral account is compensated with his intonation and facial expressions.

"Yes sir, Captain Sir," said the professor humbly. "Our small detachment (there were only thirty of us altogether and, I dare say, all Poznań notables), having proceeded through Schwiebus, Frankfurt, Berlin and Wittenberg, arrived in Zerbst to replace the local garrison. This was the so-called Zerbst Battalion of semi-disabled war veterans—the fingerless, the lame, the one-eyed, those with heart trouble and those hard of hearing, psychopaths and chronic venereal cases. They organised platoons and squads according to their types of disabilities..."

I looked at the professor in disbelief.

But Savelyev nodded his head in confirmation and said:

"Yes, the Germans sometimes did that. They found a certain organisational convenience in it. I've had to question prisoners from a company which was made up strictly of those with duodenal ulcers."

Heartened by this support, the professor continued:

"These invalids were old, experienced front-line soldiers, and after our arrival they would have been sent off to the front once again. At my suggestion we organised a formal honorary send-off for them. Everything was set up on the square in front of the so-called Catherine's Palace, which at that time was still intact. The local *singerverein* performed patriotic songs with great emotion. And I, on behalf of the command, that is, Herr Oberlieutenant Koschke, spoke the parting words, taking for my model the speech of Demosthenes 'Funeral Oration over the Athenians Who Had Fallen at Chaeroneia'.

"With no false modesty I must say that my improvisation came off quite well. Many, especially the ladies, shed a few tears at that touching moment when, raising my voice, I reminded all present of the German's debt before the Führer and Grossdeutschland. Unfortunately, the invalids were not entirely filled with a sense of the high honour which had fallen to their lot and they interrupted my speech with inappropriate cries such as: '*Schweinehunde*!*, What a *schiebung*** they' ve set up! When will we finally see you at the front, you hog-bellies!', which made it necessary for me to send off a report to the group commander of the Vistula troops, Reich Minister Himmler, informing him of the presence of oppositional sentiments and a lack of German spirit among the Zerbst Battalion of semi-disabled.

"With the exception of this incident, our life in the army flowed along quietly. We carried out the guard duty, which was quite easy, and patiently waited for the war's end, which, as I understood it, was not far off. The war passed by our little town. Your honourable armed forces advanced from the northeast, aiming for Berlin.

"We realised that Zerbst was meant to be taken by the British and American forces, which raised no special protest on the part of the majority of soldiers in our detachment, who were hoping to renew their old business ties with the British and American firms, whose representatives they expected they would meet among the advancing enemy horde.

"In expectation of these events, I brushed up my knowledge of English, reading Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Edgar Burroughs' novel *Tarzan and the City of Gold* in the

* Dirty swine! (Ger.)—*Ed.*
** jobbery. (Ger.)—*Ed.*

original... I don't doubt that everything would have ended smoothly if it hadn't been for the venturesome habit picked up by our leader Herr Oberlieutenant Koschke, and which played a fatal role in the destiny of Zerbst.

"Finding himself in the army, Herr Koschke took to wine. His motives were laudable; wine served for him as a means to summon up his German valour. And in order to keep it from waning, he drank constantly. The only time he was sober was first thing in the morning when he had just woken up. At that moment his eyes usually fell upon the case with anti-tank grenades that stood in the corner of his room and he would shudder. Upon hearing the buzz of our liaison plane, an old 'Stork', he would run to the nearest underground bunker. Even his own legs, wrapped tight in high army boots with spurs, terrified him. He would grab a bottle of brandwein and drain it. For him there was no transitional stage. From the depths of cowardice he would soar without pause to the heights of valour. In this condition of *furoris teutonici**, as described by Tacitus in his *De moribus germanorum***, he would drive the citizens of Zerbst out to build redoubts. And while the residents got calluses digging in the dirt, Herr Koschke would walk along the newly piled ramparts and, waving a sabre pilfered from the Catherine museum, would shout: 'German citizens! Your hearts are filled with fidelity and love for order! Through sacrifice to victory! Germans, we will destroy the satanic forces of the enemy!' and other such slogans from the propaganda leaflets of Doctor Goebbels, which arrived every Friday at all provincial *ortsgrupps* of the NSDAP***. Meanwhile the enemy forces, making their way through Braunschweig and Saxony without a single battle, approached Zerbst..."

"The 12th American Army Group, commanded by Lieutenant-General Simpson," interjected Savelyev.

"Quite correct, Captain Sir. We spent a sleepless night. But all was quiet. Apparently the Americans slept, never failing, even in wartime, to maintain a sensible, healthy regimen. Of all of us, only Herr Koschke slept, tranquilised by brandwein, whose dose he had doubled upon learning of the approaching enemy.

"It was barely dawn when the burgomaster of Zerbst, Herr von Schleppen, owner of the largest button factory in the Anhalt province, woke Koschke. Herr von Schleppen announced that it was necessary to go immediately to meet the Americans with a proposal to surrender the town of Zerbst and in this way avoid any unnecessary casualties among the civilian population.

"The Herr Oberlieutenant, with the reasonableness which

* Teutonic fury. (Lat.)—*Ed.*
** On the Manner of Germans. (Lat.)—Ed.
*** National Socialist (Nazi) Party.—*Ed.*

marked his early morning hours, instantly agreed with the burgomaster.

" 'Go, dear von Schleppen, and hurry, before they start...' Herr Koschke shuddered slightly and added, 'to shoot. I have complete confidence in your diplomatic tact.'

" 'It seems to me that you should go as well,' said the burgomaster.

"But the Herr Oberlieutenant objected that it wasn't appropriate for him to go in view of the insignificance of his detachment; then he pulled a flask from under his pillow and took a sip.

"Fetching white flags, two buglers, and me as an interpreter, the Herr Burgomaster headed out for the enemy camp. Soon we ran into an American patrol..."

"Two words about your feelings at that moment," said Savelyev. A heavy heart? A patriot's grief? Hurt national pride or other such feelings? Perhaps some of you cried?"

"No, we didn't cry," said Voss in his reasonable tone. "I was distracted by preparing myself for my coming role as dragoman, and mentally repeating irregular English verbs. As for the burgomaster, the bitterness of defeat was slightly reduced by the hope for future expansion of his button sales... Upon spotting the Americans, the burgomaster, in accordance with the terms of the Hague Convention of 1907 on the Laws and Customs of War, waved his white flags and the buglers began blowing their horns.

"At that moment civic grief genuinely touched us with its mournful wing. We realised that we were about to take part in a great historic event, like that at Compiègne, full of tragedy but not devoid of a certain sombre magnificence. In any case, we were prepared to conduct ourselves with dignity. Herr von Schleppen whispered to me:

" 'If they attempt to degrade the honour of Germany, I will leave, in the same way Count Brockdorff-Rantzau withdrew from the hall at Versailles in 1918.'

"The Americans, four privates, sat on the ground playing cards. One of them said:

" 'Bob, accompany these drivelling Fritzes to the commander. Jack will play for you.'

" 'Did you break your leg or something?' asked Bob sarcastically. 'I see right through you, Tom; you want me to go so you'll start winning. I'm just too good a player for you...'

" 'Aw shut up, you pug-nosed bulldog!" said Tom. 'I've already taken the Fritzes up there three times and you've only gone once. You obviously came to Europe to get fat, not to fight.'

"They started to squabble amongst themselves. Egged on by others, they jumped up several times, rolling up their sleeves and ready to fight, but then sat back down.

"In the end, the one they called Jack said to us:

" 'Look here, fellows, why don't you just go on up to the commander's yourselves. You Fritzes love to be led by the bit like blind mules. You can see we're busy. Well, go on, step lively, you curs.'

"He obligingly pointed out the road to us and soon we came to the commander's tent. But the Roman saying is true: '*Festina lente*'*. We had hurried for nothing. The commander was still asleep. Many Germans had gathered near the tent, waiting for him to wake up.

" 'Who's last in line?' inquired Herr von Schleppen.

"An elderly man in a boater hat and dark glasses answered.

" 'We'll have to wait,' said Herr von Schleppen, sinking onto a bench near him and adding philosophically: 'What's to do, we live in an age of queues...'

"A couple of hours later we heard movement inside the tent. The commander had woken up. Then he had to shave and have his breakfast. Finally he came out to see us. He was a young first-lieutenant.

" 'Truce envoys all?' he asked, yawning. 'Surrendering? Unconditionally? Where from?'

"Calls were heard:

" 'From Schweidnitz!'

" 'From Börlitz!'

" 'From Gretenganuchen!'

" From Zerbst!'

" 'Okay,' said the first-lieutenant, 'approach the clerk in order of the line and sign your surrenders. Only don't push and don't make a racket. The Major is still asleep.'

"To the side, a staff sergeant was sitting at a folding table. He had copies of a ready-made unconditional surrender form, obviously printed on the march. Spaces had been left for the name of the town and the date.

"Herr von Schleppen and I appreciated the efficiency of this procedure and the fact that there was nothing degrading to German dignity in it. Don't you agree?

"When it was our turn to sign the clerk asked angrily:

" 'Where's your army representative? Don't you know the rules? Is this the first time you surrender?'

"Indeed, all the other delegations had had a military representative.

" 'Herr clerk!' said the burgomaster worriedly, 'we have

* Rush slowly. (Lat.)—*Ed.*

the full consent of the army, and in fact, our entire garrison numbers only thirty men.'

"But the ill-tempered staff sergeant didn't want to listen and we were wondering what to do, when suddenly Herr Oberlieutenant Koschke appeared, huffing and puffing. His face was completely red and he wheezed noisily. The long sabre dragged along the ground clanking loudly.

" 'Here's our representative from the armed forces of Zerbst!' exclaimed the burgomaster happily.

" 'Well, go ahead,' grumbled the clerk, 'just sign your surrender right here.'

" 'There'll be no surrender!' roared Herr Koschke. 'Schleppen, I'll have you hanged for a traitor! Zerbst will fight! We'll destroy your satanic...'

" 'Okay, so we'll fight,' the first-lieutenant interrupted him, yawning.

"I moved closer to Herr Koschke. From the look of his red face and the smell of brandwein I knew he was totally drunk.

"The clerk grumbled:

" 'You've just wasted my paper. First-Lieutenant, let 'em go ahead and sign the surrender. If this keeps up, we'll run out of forms.'

" 'Don't hold them up, Brown,' said the first-lieutenant, 'otherwise they won't have time to write their wills.'

"Hearing this, Herr von Schleppen winced and our commander took up shouting again:

" 'Germany fears no one but God! Send out your infantry, my glorious grenadiers will reduce them to ashes!'

" 'You won't see our infantry,' said the first-lieutenant coldly. 'It would be too bad if some inebriated fanatic shoot our boys in the back. The life of one American is dearer to me than your whole stinking town. Get out of here!'

"We realised that diplomatic negotiations had been severed and withdrew... What can I tell you? The first-lieutenant proved true to his word, we never saw the American soldiers. All we saw were American planes. At two in the afternoon they appeared over the town like God's thunder, or the Devil's envoys perhaps. They bombed us for forty-five minutes straight. The result lies before you. Half of Zerbst was reduced to dust. Including the famous palace of Catherine the Great. Several hundred people were killed. Blood and dust mingled. It would appear my sins are not that great. The Lord desired that I remain whole in order to relate to you the story of the conquering of Zerbst, a tale worthy of Polybius's pen. *Acta est fabula**."

* End of story. (Lat.)—*Ed.*

"And what happened to your Herr Koschke?" asked Savelyev.

"As soon as the first bombs began to explode, the Herr Oberlieutenant sobered instantly. He rushed to the bunker underneath the storeroom, the safest shelter in town, but death found him even there..."

"A direct hit?"

"No... He didn't fall at the hands of the enemy. The vengeful Lord sent him a more agonising death... He was killed by the enraged citizens of Zerbst."

"A remarkable story," mumbled Savelyev.

His face was filled with satisfaction.

"You see, I was right," I said, "just the thing for your collection."

"Now, perhaps," said Savelyev. "Catherine alone, without Koschke, wasn't enough for me, just as Koschke without Catherine wouldn't have been. But together—that's an entirely different matter... Incidentally, Voss, you as a historian should know. When was Catherine the Great born and when did she leave Zerbst?"

"Sophia Augusta Frederica of Anhalt-Zerbst," answered the professor, "taking the name Catherine upon accepting the Orthodox faith, deigned to be born on the night of April 21, 1729. But not here."

"What do you mean, not here? Isn't this the same Zerbst?"

"The very same, Captain sir. There is only one Zerbst in Germany. But in reality the Empress Catherine the Great was born in the town of Stettin, where her majesty's father was a regimental commander and lived in a three-room government apartment. At the age of fifteen the empress was taken to St. Petersburg, having been in Zerbst only once, at the age of eleven, and for no more than four and a half days at that."

"I don't understand a thing," mumbled Savelyev slightly bewildered. "And what about the Catherine's Palace? And the museum devoted to her? And the portraits in all the shop windows? What is all that? A myth? A legend?"

"Captain sir, that is no legend. That is commerce. It was in the interests of Zerbst's residents to make Zerbst the birthplace of Catherine the Great. It drew tourists here and was not the least source of income for the municipal budget. It is my humble opinion that the supervisory commission of the victorious powers should take this into consideration. Dessau produces soap and airplanes, Schweidnitz pottery, and Zerbst for two hundred years has been selling Catherine the Great, not counting the manufacture of decimal scales for weighing cattle...' "

Savelyev and I looked at each other and burst out laughing. The professor looked at us in polite perplexity.

"Perhaps, gentlemen officers," he said worriedly, "a few historical facts about Zerbst would be of use? Zerbst, first known as Zirwisti, is mentioned as far back as the year 1007... Its origins were Slavic. In 1253 it was given to the feudal estate of the margrave of Brandenburg. In 1307..."

We stood up and went to the door. The professor minced his way after us, exclaiming "I hope you enjoyed your bath, gentlemen" and bowing constantly.

Coming out through the door we collided with some elderly fat man, who was walking leisurely down the street. He politely tipped his top hat and continued on towards the park. Professor Voss nodded to him in a friendly manner and whispered to us:

"That's Herr von Schleppen, the last burgomaster of Zerbst."

As we said our goodbyes, the professor asked us for "*russische zigaretten*" and the scraps of the *Komsomolskaya pravda* in which my laundry was wrapped.

"I'll read to the lads about what's going on in the great wide world," he said, nodding his head in the direction of his comrades. As before they were squatting quietly near the wall.

One of the "lads", a young lanky peasant type, suddenly straightened up in front of me and shouted something. I didn't understand him as he spoke in some kind of a dialect full of drawn-out and nasal sounds, the way they speak in the north of Germany.

"What did he say?"

"He asked in the rough slang of the Holstein peasants whether the one who had caused the German people so much suffering would be punished. He means Hitler," the professor explained, smiling indulgently.

We went out into the street. It was still light outside. Curfew had not yet begun and the people were walking in the park, staidly stepping over the puddles. It had just rained. The sky was washed clean as if enameled. The first stars appeared, shining like buttons. Leaning against an acacia tree, the burgomaster stared up at them, lost in thought. The acacia sent its soapy smell into the air. The sunset turned everything to that awful yellow. The earth was damp, the air seemed clammy. A warm breeze scraped the leaves with a tinny sound. Oh this dismal foreign land!

1945

EMMANUIL KAZAKEVICH

The House on the Square

(Chapters)

"Why is there no water or electricity in the town?" Lubentsov demanded, turning to Seelenbach who was standing on the pavement stiff and erect, hat in hand.

Seelenbach began explaining. Lubentsov understood him well enough, but he patiently heard out Kranz's translation. The town had received its electricity supply from a place which was still in the British zone, the Bürgermeister said, and now that the British had withdrawn from Lauterburg they had cut off the supply. When pressed by Lubentsov, he said there was a local electric power plant as well, but it had been seriously damaged; besides, it burned coal which was not to be had now.

"How was it before the war?" Lubentsov asked. "Did the local power station take care of your needs?"

"Only partly. It's a small station—only eight thousand kilowatts."

"How long have you been short of coal?"

Seelenbach did not reply at once. He looked at Lubentsov. The tall, broad-shouldered Soviet commandant with the candid blue eyes struck him as a nice, simple chap, a lady-killer perhaps, but not too bright. And although the fuel shortage had set in only a few days before, when it became known that the British would be leaving, he replied with a quick glance at Kranz:

"For quite some time now."

Kranz translated.

"So we're doomed to live without electricity, is that it?" Lubentsov smiled. "There are coal mines in the vicinity, aren't there? Where? Only thirty kilometres from here?" Lubentsov chuckled. "All my life I've heard people talk about the efficiency of the Germans, but now I see they were wrong. Herr Seelenbach. I refuse to believe you can't cope with a little problem like that. It's a disgrace, Herr Seelen-

The novel *The House on the Square* written by Emmanuil Kazakevich in 1956 is based on the work of a Soviet officer serving as military commandant of a German town and resolutely implementing the policy of reorganising life on principles of justice and humaneness.

The material used in the novel is to some extent autobiographical; Kazakevich served as a military commandant in Germany in 1945.

* Kazakevich, *The House on the Square,* Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1958, pp. 103-112, 205-219.

bach. Downright inefficiency." He waited for Kranz to translate, and noted that the interpreter did a conscientious job of it. "Let's go out to electric power plant at once and look it over. Come on, *Davai, davai.*"*

Kranz translated but ran into difficulties when it came to the "*davai, davai*". "Quick, hurry up," he finally essayed a guess at one of the many shades of meaning the word carried, and then added, "Get busy!"

They all got into the bürgermeister's car and crossing the railway tracks headed for the mountains.

Soon they pulled up in front of a small yellow-brick building that really did show signs of war damage. The perfect silence of the place was broken only by the soughing of the trees and the rippling of brooks, and there was no sign of life apart from the sleepy-looking Soviet sentry at the entrance who eyed the newcomers with imperturbable calm. Inside the tile-floored power-house, however, stood two gleaming generators that appeared to be in perfect condition.

"Call the mechanic, please," Lubentsov said.

Seelenbach shrugged his shoulders and looked about him as if expecting the mechanic to appear at any moment. Exchanging a few words with Kranz, he set out down the main road but turned and came back for another whispered conference with the interpreter.

"The mechanic lives in the second house to the left," the sentry said.

Kranz trotted over to the house and returned in ten minutes with a phlegmatic-looking middle-aged man whom he introduced as "Herr Mayer, the mechanic." The mechanic greeted Lubentsov. Kranz translated for the commandant, with Mayer interjecting monosyllabic grunts.

When Lubentsov had told him what was wanted, Mayer explained that all the workers had gone away, he did not know where, and that they were short of coal.

"There's coal down in the gully, Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel," the sentry put in again.

Lubentsov went over to the edge of the ravine, and the others followed. Mayer looked at the heap of coal and said it was enough to keep the station running three days from night-fall to one o'clock in the morning.

"All right," said Lubentsov. "When can you begin, Herr Mayer?"

"Tomorrow," the mechanic replied.

"You can't do it today?"

Mayer thought it over for a moment before saying, "Why, yes, it can be done."

* A colloquial Russian expression, like "Come on" in English.—*Tr.*

"Splendid!" cried Lubentsov. "In the meantime we'll see that you get the coal you need. The bürgermeister here will attend to it. In these two or three days he'll have your bunkers overflowing. Right, Herr Seelenbach?"

"*Jawohl*," the bürgermeister said gloomily.

They climbed back into the car, but when Seelenbach told his chauffeur to drive back to town, Lubentsov objected.

"Why back to town? Who's going to attend to the coal? No, my friend, you can't put it off. Let's take a look at the mines."

The car swung around, and skirting the town, followed a road leading down to a stretch of flat country. Villages flashed past, and Lubentsov regretted he did not have the time to stop and see what was going on in each of them.

He showered Kranz with questions, for everything he saw aroused his interest. For instance, the ruins that topped many of the hills overlooking the country. They turned out to be the remnants of baronial castles that had once protected the duchy against brigand raids and peasant revolts.

High above the grain fields hung a cableway suspended from steel towers. Waggonettes which not so long ago had carried copper and iron ore from mines in the mountains to the railway station now hung there motionless, for the mines too were at a standstill. Lubentsov jotted something down in his notebook.

The car made good time, covering the thirty-five kilometres to their destination in half an hour.

"Now where are the pits?" Lubentsov turned to his companions.

It turned out that neither Seelenbach nor Kranz had ever been here before. They came to some long, low sheds standing off the road. Lubentsov told the driver to stop and went over to them. First he looked into what was obviously the office, then into a machine shop, but there was not a soul anywhere. Following a path that led past piles of timber into a stretch of feather-grass and tall ferns that suggested anything but an industrial scene, he finally came to the brink of a huge oval pit. Railway tracks spiralled down its slopes, and several locomotives and waggons, looking like so many immobile beetles, could be seen standing there. In the sheer uneven sides of the huge open-cut working one could read the geology of these parts—beneath the thin top layer of grey earth overgrown with feather-grass and ferns was a stratum of reddish clay, then a thick one of white sand, and finally a black layer of coal. Here and there the motionless

jib of an excavator jutted up. In the middle was a good-sized lake and next to it, the pump-house.

Lubentsov looked back and saw Kranz standing beside him. Seelenbach had lagged behind; he was still struggling through the tall grass.

"So this is the pit," Lubentsov said.

"Yes, sir," said Kranz. "Open cut. They dig brown coal here."

All three returned to the car and drove on to the miners' settlement. It was a typical German village whose only distinguishing feature was the faint smell of crude oil that hung over it.

"Perhaps you can find someone from the pit," Lubentsov said as they stopped at a street crossing. "The manager perhaps."

Seelenbach bowed and walked off up the street.

"What's the matter with him?" Lubentsov asked Kranz, but the interpreter only shrugged his shoulders and smiled politely. "Doesn't seem to have any life in him. What on earth made you elect him?"

"He was appointed by the American Military Government," Kranz explained.

"What's his profession?"

"He owns a shop, a very big shop."

"A shopkeeper, eh?" Lubentsov said.

Kranz did not catch the note of contempt in the commandant's voice. Instead he seemed to be pleased at being reminded of the Russian word for "shopkeeper" which he had evidently forgotten.

"That's right! A shopkeeper. That's what I wanted to say."

Seelenbach soon returned with the information that the manager had gone to Braunschweig with the British.

"But there must be somebody left?"

"There isn't."

"Impossible. What about the workers?"

"Oh, they're here of course."

"Where can we find them?"

"They live somewhere here, I suppose," Seelenbach said, shrugging his shoulders.

Disgusted with the bürgermeister's helplessness, Lubentsov started down the street. At the next corner he saw a pub with a big yellow sign reading "Glückauf" over the entrance and walked in. The place was packed as if on a holiday.

As Lubentsov entered the men laid down their glasses of pale beer and turned to look at him. Silence fell over the place.

"What's this?" Lubentsov said. "How can you sit here drinking beer when there's coal waiting to be mined!"

What struck the miners most of all was the tone in which he said it, as if he were reproaching them for letting him down personally. Some of the men smiled guiltily.

"You say the manager's run away," he went on, taking a chair. "And you call that a reason. Why, in the Soviet Union the managers skipped it nearly thirty years ago, but coal never stopped being mined."

Kranz, his thin lips smiling, translated. The workers laughed.

"Now let's see what you've got here," Lubentsov continued. "Have you a trade union? Aren't there Communists or Social-Democrats among you? Or haven't you got a damn thing? What about you, for instance?" He jabbed his finger at a young man, but the latter was too much taken aback to reply. "Come on," he urged, smiling encouragingly, "tell us about yourself."

"I'm a worker," the young man replied in a barely audible voice.

"What about you? And you? And you?" Lubentsov turned to the others.

"Labourer."

"Labourer."

"Excavator operator."

"Miner."

"Mechanic."

"Foreman."

"Any of you Communists?"

No one spoke up.

"We had some Communists once, but that was a long time ago," an old man said.

"Just a moment, Karl," put in his neighbour, a man of about the same age. "We've got one Communist."

"That's right," added a third. "One there is."

"Who?" asked a fourth old man.

"Hans Eperle. Didn't you know?"

Several other old miners added their confirmation.

"Where can I find him?" Lubentsov asked. He liked the way these veterans talked, and it occurred to him that in spite of differences of language and appearance, they were very much like Russian workers.

"I'll go and fetch him," one youngster volunteered and dashed out. In a couple of minutes he was back with a tall, lean man in blue overalls.

"I understand you are a Communist," Lubentsov said.

"That's right. Got back from prison camp a month ago."

Lubentsov found himself looking into a pair of deep, grave eyes. Under other circumstances he would have given way to the emotion heroism always inspired in him. Now, however, the swift tempo of the life he had embarked upon allowed of no such pauses for introspection, no time for reverent reflection, and Lubentsov was keenly sensitive to that tempo. And hence it was with reproaches, questions and suggestions that he now faced Eperle.

"Been back a month, you say. But what have you got to show for it? What have you accomplished in this time, Comrade Eperle? Why isn't anybody working? Why aren't the electric power stations operating and the railways running to schedule? How many Communists do you have here? Six? Why, that's a lot! Quite a lot. And how many Social-Democrats? Thirty! And you've got a trade union too? Seems you've got everything but coal! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

The crowd in the pub had been growing while he spoke.

Some of the miners started to explain that the British had shipped off part of the machinery and that the Henrietta Pit belonged to a mining company which had its headquarters in the British zone of occupation. Nothing had been heard from the head office, the manager had run away, and so on.

"Well, what of it?" Lubentsov was losing his temper. "The workers have remained, haven't they? And the workers are what really matters. When are you Germans going to realise that you can get along without the old company managers?"

In the end it was agreed that the pit would resume work the next day, but hardly had the decision been reached when one of the veteran pit-hands asked:

"What about wages? What are we going to get for it?"

"And food—is there going to be anything in the shops?" another old-timer put in, chewing his lips.

Lubentsov did not quite know what to say. He scowled at the old miners. He did not like their looks at all now. Just when everything seemed to have been settled so satisfactorily, here they were talking of wages, and supplies, and work clothes, and other mercenary considerations. To hear all this from these German workers whom he had to all intents and purposes generously forgiven their past sins on behalf of the Soviet people, seemed to him to be nothing short of insulting.

The full purport of these "mercenary considerations" Lubentsov came to realise later when he went with Eperle

to his home. There he found two little children, a boy and a girl, and a woman of about forty having their dinner. Their food—a mess of acorns and beechnuts called "pelotin"—the threadbare clothes they wore and the squalor of their surroundings spoke of such abject poverty that Lubentsov felt a pang of remorse at the thought of his juvenile outburst of administrative zeal.

It cost him no little effort to suppress the pity he felt for these unfortunate people. He reminded himself of his compatriots at home, the victors in the war, who lived no better, at least in those parts of the Soviet Union which the Wehrmacht had overrun. He reminded himself of all Europe ground down by the hunger and want into which it had been plunged by German aggression. But as justified as all these reflections were, they could not blind him to the fact that the people in the area under his jurisdiction were starving. As a private individual he might tell himself that the Germans had only themselves to blame, but as the commandant he had no right to allow himself to be carried away by personal feelings.

Besides, as he looked at the Eperle family, he realised that he too was hungry, for he had not eaten for quite some time; but he realised, too, that for him it was easier to satisfy his hunger than it was for the German workers.

After his talk with Eperle, Lubentsov, accompanied by Kranz, returned to the car, where he found Seelenbach waiting. The bürgermeister, whose existence Lubentsov had completely forgotten, was standing there motionless like a great black crane. Without a word all three got into the car. Lubentsov asked Seelenbach how he proposed to get the coal to the power-plant. There were several transport firms in town, the bürgermeister said, but he doubted whether they had the petrol needed. Further questioning elicited the information that there was a synthetic petrol-plant in the neighbourhood of Fichtenrode.

"We'll get the petrol" muttered Lubentsov, who remembered that the commandant at Fichtenrode was an acquaintance of his, Major Pigarev, who had formerly served at corps headquarters.

Kranz translated what Lubentsov said with the same ring of conviction in his voice. At the same time he marvelled at the ease with which this Russian got things done; it must have been because he simply could not imagine that there was anything in the world it was impossible to do. Like all Communists, he probably did not believe in God; he believed in progress, and optimism was his creed. Nevertheless the problems confronting him were more complex than he

thought, Kranz told himself as he watched Lubentsov out of the corner of his eye.

As for Seelenbach, he too scrutinised the commandant in sullen silence. The Russian had turned out to be a much less simple type than he had thought at first. Or perhaps he *was* simple—the bürgermeister could not make up his mind on that score—but be that as it may, he had something in his training, background and habits, his own specific way of approaching things, that had been completely lacking in the Western commandants, who in general had not been interested in getting things done...

The city of Lauterburg watched the commandant's office with close and guarded attention.

The commandant's office was open to anyone who had any request to make or complaint to lodge, nevertheless it lived its own life, withdrawn and a trifle mysterious. It was connected by telephone and radio with Altstadt, Halle, Berlin and, evidently, with Moscow as well. Messengers were constantly arriving in Soviet Army cars to deliver sealed envelopes and coded messages.

The blue-eyed commandant—a young but very intelligent and effiicient lieutenant-colonel, who knew German quite well but pretended not to (as had been observed on many occasions), and English too, though he pretended not to know that language either (this rumour was spread by old Kranz)—drove around the district a great deal, appearing in the most unexpected places. He seemed never to sleep and his capacity for work amazed everyone. He read a great deal too, and had bought a large number of German books in Hans Minden's bookshop. It was noticed that at first he had bought grammars and school readers, then guidebooks and diverse reference books on Germany, later began to ask for detective stories, and finally passed on to the classics, one day purchasing a complete set of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing and Uhland. Sometimes he drove around the town at nigtht, or went for long walks, turning up now at a restaurant, now at a hotel, now at a cinema. He visited the cathedral and the castle, issued the town hall special licences for building materials to repair these historical monuments, ordered damaged houses to be repaired without delay, and so on.

He had earned the nickname of "Oberstleutenant *Davai-Davai*" because his instructions to clear away the rubble in the streets, to repair an automobile, to start a factory, or open a shop would invariably wind up with that strange

Russian word whose meaning was not clear but which sounded at once like a command and a blessing. The nickname itself contained both a touch of raillery at the commandant's over-fondness for that particular word, and recognition of his dynamic energy.

He had a passion, this young man, for putting everybody to work. The sight of idleness or slovenliness caused him deep, almost childish, distress. At such times his voice, usually rather high-pitched, would drop to almost a bass and he would say in a tone of hurt bewilderment:

"Look here! That won't do, you know! That won't do at all." Then his voice would return to its normal pitch and in his usual rapid and confident manner he would utter those familiar Russian words which had become almost proverbial for the Germans: "We've got to work, you know. *Davai, davai*!"

The office itself was given a nickname. It was known locally as the "House on the Square". That name evoked different emotions in different people. In some it inspired fear, in others respect. In some hostility, in others confidence. Some people referred to the office thus in order to avoid saying the real name. With others the name had a friendly, even caressing ring. At any rate the House on the Square had firmly established itself in the life of Lauterburg town and province. Its activities were the subject of diverse comment, but no one could deny the fact that the House on the Square was doing its best to bring order into the lives of the townsfolk, to restore industry and trade to normal. It was not always successful, but it scrupulously sought to carry out all the decisions of the Potsdam Conference—it was dismantling military plants, it had instituted a search for war criminals, and was removing from their posts in private as well as state institutions all persons who had been active functionaries of the Nazi party.

As for what went on within the commandant's office, that was discussed in whispers: "Someone has arrived at the House on the Square"; "There was an important conference in the House on the Square. The General was present"; "Something is afoot in the House on the Square, they are in conference"; "The House on the Square won't allow it"; "The House on the Square is liable to interfere"; "We'll have to ask the House on the Square to intervene".

The Lauterburgians turned out to be rather good judges of character, and it was not long before they had sized up all the occupants of the House on the Square fairly accurately. Kasatkin was not generally liked; although he was just, he was also very strict, perhaps because he did not yet see

the Germans as people but merely as objects of the commandants' administrative functions. Captain Chegodayev had a reputation for being hot-tempered but not malicious. He might kick up a row but he would soon calm down, get to the root of the trouble and make a fair decision that would be in the interests of both the Soviet administration and the Germans. With the workers he was always pleasant, although he often reproached them for having been too submissive under Hitler, for not having rebelled or gone on strike.

Captain Yavorsky was respected for his excellent knowledge of German, his pleasant manners and kind heart, which some were not slow to take advantage of for their own ends. But he had one failing—he never acted independently and nearly always ended up his extremely intelligent and sensible remarks and advice with the words: "In any case I shall take it up with the commandant."

Captain Vorobeitsev was not liked in Lauterburg. It was impossible to tell what was likely to please him and what would arouse his anger. Like the others, he was courteous in his dealings with ordinary working people, but was harsh and even rude towards all employers, big and small alike. However, the various factory-owners, shopkeepers, tradesmen, proprietors of tailoring, shoemaking and like establishments soon discovered that this captain did not exactly scorn material benefits, and believed in enjoying life. They did not share this secret with one another but they all made use of it as much as they could. At the same time they feared him perhaps more than any of the other officers because of his ungovernable temper and his sharp tongue, because he knew their business inside out and could spot unerringly the slightest violation of Control Council laws and Administration regulations.

With Captain Chokhov and Senior Lieutenant Menshov the townsfolk had few dealings since the former was occupied chiefly with the Soviet Army men who came to town, finding quarters for them, arranging for their board and lodging, etc., while Menshov spent most of his time in the countryside.

As for the commandant himself, a rather complicated relationship was soon formed between him and the population of the town. Although he faithfully carried out all the measures aimed ultimately at the elimination of Germany's war potential, and although he strictly enforced all the existing rules and regulations, nevertheless before very long there were few people in the town who did not cherish a warm, if undemonstrative, friendship for Lieutenant-

Colonel Lubentsov. This was because all his actions were prompted not only by a sense of duty, but by a deep personal conviction that everything he did was vitially necessary. He was interested in everything—in schools, factories, kindergartens, the quality of factory output, seed for planting, petrol, coal, etc.—not because it was his duty to concern himself with all these things, but because he honestly believed them to be essential to the welfare of the people in the area he administered. And the people sensed this. If in the case of Kasatkin they feltthat his concern for the welfare of the population was dictated not by any personal feeling but by his official capacity; if Yavorsky brought to his work the somewhat abstract approach of a mathematician to the solution of an absorbing problem; if in the behaviour of Chegodayev, Menshov and to some extent of Vorobeitsev as well, there was a shade of youthful vanity and pride in the knowledge that they had the power to influence the lives of so many people, in Lubentsov there was nothing of the kind. In him duty and human feeling were totally merged.

He never attempted to hide the bitter truth from the Germans. In this respect he was perhaps over-pedantic and he never missed an opportunity to remind them of their great crime against the Soviet people and the necessity of atoning for their guilt. Constant contact between the Russians and their former enemies in their official capacity and especially in everyday life tended to dull the memory of past sins. People are much the same everywhere. Lauterburg laughed at the same jokes as Tambov, wept over the same slights as Khabarovsk, blushed at the same obscenities and paled at the same insults. And these innumerable human similarities could not but bring the Russians and Germans closer together. Lubentsov understood this and in his heart of hearts he did not resent it. What he wanted was that what had been should not be forgotten, for that alone justified his and his comrades' presence here, justified that curtailment of rights without which the Germans could not enter the family of free nations.

Lubentsov received callers in his private office, a large well-lighted room which once served as boardroom for a joint stock company, the Lauterburg A.G. It was furnished with a large desk covered with green baize, a safe, a long conference table placed against the desk in such a way as to form that letter "T" so beloved of bureaucrats. The conference table was covered with a green table-cloth to match the baize on the desk—Voronin, who had dug up the cloth somewhere, had been extremely proud of his elegant taste.

Portraits of Lenin and Stalin hung on the wall to the left of the desk. On the right were two large windows. Later on, Voronin brought portraits of Marx and Engels from the Soviet Military Administration: he considered it highly appropriate that the portraits of these two great Germans, the connecting links, as it were, between the ideological life of both countries, should hang in the office of the Soviet commandant.

Under the portraits was a map of the district on which Lubentsov had had a local artist draw tiny heaps of coal briquets, fish, horses, hogs, ears of rye, carrots, miniature factories with tall chimneys and other symbols representing the natural resources and industries of the area.

Behind the glass doors of the bookcase stood the numerous reference books Lubentsov had acquired, dealing with the economy and history of the area, pamphlets, solid tomes, guide-books. In the same bookcase Lubentsov kept a detailed card index file wherein he recorded miscellaneous items of information concerning every town, village and hamlet in the district. He made the entries himself, jotting down figures on tax income, output of farm produce for the market, timber workings, increase in dairy cattle and sheep, fish catch, factory plan fulfilment as well as brief biographies of bürgermeisters, school-teachers, lawyers, party and trade-union functionaries.

News of Lubentsov's index file had reached the townsfolk and all sorts of mysterious rumours were circulated about it. It was whispered that the index contained life stories of every citizen of Lauterburg unto the third generation.

Of late the townsfolk could not have failed to notice that the House on the Square had become the scene of feverish activity. Conferences lasting far into the night were continually being held there. Village bürgermeisters and peasants were frequent visitors. Deputations of refugees from Silesia, the Sudeten region and East Prussia had been received by the commandant twice within the past few weeks. Dust-covered automobiles were constantly driving up to the entrance of the house.

A land reform was about to be introduced. The first inkling of it came from meetings held in the countryside. Farm-hands and poor peasants had applied to the Soviet Administration, asking that the landlords' estates be divided up. Particularly stormy had been the meetings of the refugees. These people, who had lost all their worldly possessions and who lived crowded together in encampments, were now asking for allotments of land to cultivate.

The resolutions of these meetings were printed in the

Communist newspaper *Volkszeitung* and the Social-Democrat *Volksblatt*. In due time conferences of the democratic party bloc were held at which representatives of the Communist Party made public the draft of the reform. The draft set forth that all estates of more than one hundred hectares were to be divided up. As for the estates belonging to war criminals, these were to be confiscated without compensation, even those less than a hundred hectares in area. All the land—ploughland, woods and meadows—was to be parcelled out to the peasants, chiefly farm labourers, refugees and the village poor.

Now that Lauterburg had been made the administrative centre of the district by order of the Soviet Military Administration, the next step was to set up a district administration. General Kuprianov advised Lubentsov to appoint a non-party man as the *Landrat*, someone who enjoyed some prestige among all sections of the population. Lerche, the new bürgermeister Vorländer and Jost, the police chief, suggested a certain Professor Sebastian for the post. Grellmann and Mauritius supported the proposal. At Lubentsov's instructions they had approached the professor on the matter, but without success. The professor had declined to assume the post of *Landrat*.

"Declined?" cried Lubentsov. "That shows you didn't use the correct approach. What sort of a person is he? An honest man? How can an honest man refuse to work at such a difficult time? Where does he live? I'll go and talk to him myself."

"You live in his house," said Jost.

Lubentsov was greatly surprised.

"You mean my landlord!" he exclaimed. "A very reserved gentleman. I haven't laid eyes on him yet. My fault entirely."

The same evening he asked Ksenia to come to his house. While waiting for the interpreter, he went out into the garden and for the first time since he had moved into this house he studied it carefully. He found it in exemplary order. Flowerpots with some exotic-looking plants stood under glass in the small conservatory. At the back of the house was a fountain with a chubby infant holding a bow in its hands.

The sound of a piano floated from the house. "My retiring professor is fond of music," Lubentsov said to himself, looking up at the windows of the ground floor. At that moment the music broke off and a figure in white appearred on the balcony.

It was too dark for Lubentsov to make out the woman's features. Hearing a sound down below she inquired in a musical voice, "*Wer ist da?*" When no reply came, she leaned over the railing and peered into the darkness, then with an exclamation of surprise she withdrew.

Just then the gate creaked. It was Ksenia. As they climbed up the dark staircase it suddenly occurred to Lubentsov that he ought to have telephoned first instead of descending on his host unannounced. But it was too late. On the upper landing a door opened and a light was switched on. An elderly woman in a white apron and a cap appeared. Lubentsov remembered having seen her before; evidently she was the one who cleaned his rooms in the morning.

"*Herr Kommandant...*" she uttered in a tone of mingled surprise and fear when she saw who it was.

Ksenia said that the commandant wished to see the professor on important business, and she showed them into the drawing-room.

Lubentsov asked Ksenia to say that he apologised for intruding but since the matter was urgent and since it was high time for him to pay his respects to his host and to thank him for his hospitality, he had taken the liberty of dropping in without waiting for an invitation. The old woman went out and a few minutes later a tall man in a dark suit, with youthful features in spite of his white hair, came slowly into the room. He held a pair of glasses in his hand, and on entering he raised them for a moment to his eyes like a lorgnette, but dropped them at once.

After the usual polite exchange, they sat down at a round table. Lubentsov offered the professor a cigarette which was gladly accepted. They lit up and Lubentsov proceeded to state his business without further ado.

Sebastian listened to him in silence, without interrupting him, and when he had finished, thanked Lubentsov for the honour but said he was obliged to dicline the offer owing to ill-health, and that in any case he did not think he was competent to assume such a responsible position. He was not an administrator, he was a scientist, a chemist by profession, and if it was possible to have an aim in life, his, Professor Sebastian's, aim was to complete a major research in colloidal chemistry on which he had been working for many years.

In reply Lubentsov said that he could understand the professor's desire to devote himself to peaceful scientific activity, to "what we men of action disdainfully term a sedentary existence", but he could not agree that for the sake of science which was intended to benefit mankind, one

could afford to lose sight of mankind itself. Especially at such a serious and critical period in the life of Germany as this, when it was manifestly the duty of every German, including men of science, to help the nation to get back on its feet.

"It may perhaps strike you as odd," Lubentsov went on, "that an officer of the occupation forces should be trying to persuade a German professor to consider the interests of the German people. Three months ago I myself would have thought it more than strange."

Sebastian laughed. "Yes," he said, "that is a very profound observation."

"You see," Lubentsov went on, "as a representative of the occupation authorities I am interested in seeing democratic institutions firmly established here in Germany. We cannot do this without the participation of the Germans themselves, and particularly without the help of their leading citizens—men of science, intellectuals, that section of the population which must be most keenly alive to the gravity of the situation."

"But why do you come to me particularly?" asked Sebastian.

"Because you have been recommended to me as one of the leading German intellectuals in this town."

"And you believe that if I or someone like me takes over the reins of local government it will be easier for you to achieve your purpose?" Sebastian said this somewhat defiantly, then stopped short and drummed his fingers on the table. He obviously regretted his outburst. He had not intended to be so frank; on the contrary, he wished to be as restrained as possible and not to reveal himself to the commandant in any way.

"Yes, yes!" cried Lubentsov. "That's it precisely! We are in favour of your appointment because we wish to make use of your prestige here to achieve our purpose. You have put it in a nutshell. Now what are our aims? Do they coincide with yours? And if not, in what respect do they differ? That is the whole question."

He got up and, with a triumphant glance at the professor, continued:

"You hate the Nazis. So do we. You are opposed to war. So are we. You are in favour of a strong, free, but peace-loving and democratic Germany. So are we. You know the local conditions, the traditions, the relationships better than we do, hence you must help us, you must correct us if we tend to do thoughtless or stupid things. Accept our offer and you will have boundless opportunity to help us to do our job

properly. We shall disagree on many things, no doubt, we shall argue our point of view, and you, yours. But our goal is the same. And you can help us to find the best means of achieving that goal." He sat down as if waiting for a reply, but since the professor was silent, he went on, this time calmly: "The other day I read a book which made a deep impression on me. It is a German book and a very famous one too. To my shame I had never read it before, although I had heard of it, of course, even at school. It was Goethe's *Faust*. I didn't tackle the second part—it was too difficult a task for me, particularly since I'm very busy and have no time to read as much as I would wish. Of course, you know the book very well. It is the story of a great scholar, who, having learned all there was to know, realised that with all his vast knowledge he knew very little about the life of his fellow-men, and that he must mingle with people and live their life. The principal idea of the book is contained in the second part which was too much for me." The professor smiled. "But the main thing is that the scholar finally came to the conclusion after much thought and reflection that the meaning of life consists in serving one's people and, of course, mankind in general. Don't you agree that this idea might be applied to yourself as well? I don't claim to have understood everything in the book, but I believe I have grasped its main idea, in fact, I am sure of it."

"Yes, you have," Sebastian said quietly.

At that moment Lubentsov looked up and saw a girl in a white dress standing in the doorway—evidently the girl he had seen on the balcony. Lubentsov rose. Sebastian got up too.

"Allow me to introduce you. This is my daughter, Erika."

Lubentsov bowed.

She nodded coldly and sat down on the arm of her father's chair. Her eyes had a guarded, almost unfriendly look.

"Please think it over," said Lubentsov to the professor.

"Very well," replied Sebastian, "I shall think it over. I may say that you are right in many respects and that most probably I shall accept your offer."

Lubentsov flushed with pleasure.

"In that case I shall come and see you again tomorrow, if you don't mind," he said.

"Come, by all means. I have enjoyed talking to you."

At this point the professor's daughter intervened. Looking straight at Lubentsov with an angry look in her large eyes, she said:

"Yesterday two Russian soldiers came here. They were intoxicated. We had difficulty in getting rid of them and it

was only when I told them that the Soviet commandant lived here that they finally went away."

"I hope they did not do any damage," Lubentsov said in some embarrassment.

"Nothing to speak of," Sebastian murmured.

"They took our car," said Erika.

"Your car! That's terrible!" cried Lubentsov. He shook his head with something like despair. "It shall be returned to you at once. I promise you. What sort of a car was it, what make? Ksenia, please make a note of the particulars."

"Besides taking the car," Erika Sebastian went on in an even, vicious tone, "they pestered me with their attentions."

Lubentsov blushed to the roots of his hair.

"To be frank, Herr Oberstleutnant," the professor said, stroking his daughter's shoulder placatingly, "your soldiers are very nice fellows, kind-hearted and well-behaved as a rule. I have observed them a great deal during my walks. But your drunken soldiers are terrible. Excuse me for being so outspoken..."

Lubentsov managed to laugh. Yes, he did not like the professor's outspokeness. But he forced himself to say:

"Not at all, you're quite right." Then after a brief pause he added, "All drunks are disgusting. I believe that a tipsy Russian soldier is almost as bad as a sober German one."

"That's true!" exclaimed Sebastian, relieved to be able to agree with the commandant without dissimulating. "That is very true. There is nothing more disgusting than a sober German soldier performing what he calls his duty. He is methodical in his cruelty. A calculating cutthroat, he checks his conscience at regimental headquarters for the duration to reclaim it along with his other civilian paraphernalia later on. Yes, Herr Oberstleutnant, it is not surprising that our soldier has made a name for himself in that respect. Our rulers, big and small, did their best to make mercenaries of our fighting men. There is no unjust cause for which the German mercenary will not fight. He defended the rights of the British crown in America, he fought on the side of the Swedish Protestants against the emperor, he defended the emperor against the Swedish Protestants, the Huguenots against the French king and the French king against the Huguenots."

"In the last war," said Lubentsov, "he defended the interests of the German capitalists and landowners against all peoples and against the German people as well."

"Perhaps. But that question is not yet altogether clear to me."

They parted much pleased with each other.

1956

ILYA EHRENBURG

27 April, 1945

It is easy to write now, easier than in October of forty-one: if grief is silent, joy does not begrudge words, and our hearts are filled with tremendous joy—the tragedy of the 20th century is coming to an end: we are in Berlin!

It began with a minor incident—the Reichstag was set on fire by the Nazis. It is ending at the same spot.—Berlin is burning.

Justice marches slowly, and her path has many twists and turns. It took years of bitter trials, the ashes of Warsaw and Rotterdam and Smolensk, before the arsonists learned of retribution.

There is something stupid and repulsive about the end of the third reich: swaggering graffitti on the walls and pieces of white cloth, the hysterical cries of the hauptleiters and servile smiles, were wolves with knives, and wolves in sheep's clothing. In vain did the gangsters who until only recently ruled almost the whole of Europe term themselves ministers' of "field-marshals"; they were and remain gangsters. It is not saving German towns that worries them, but saving their own skins; every hour of their life costs the lives of thousands of their compatriots. Nothing, however, can now stop the end. Hitler's Germany is giving at the seams like a piece of rotten cloth... The allies are advancing rapidly through Bavaria and Berchtesgaden, to the lair of the man-eating recluse. Meanwhile the Red Army is in Saxony, and is destroying in the streets of Berlin the last of Hitler's troops. If Germany does not capitulate, it is only because there is no one left to capitulate; the leaders are concerned with saving themselves, and the population, abandoned to their fate, are able to surrender only their own house or, at most, their street.

It is only right and proper and humane that it is the Red Army which is subduing Berlin: we began the defeat of Hitler

Germany, and we are completing it. Perhaps, when the battles were being fought in places unknown to foreigners—in Kastornoye, Korsun, Sivyanino—the world still did not realise how much it owed to the Red Army. Now even the blind can see who it is who has travelled from the Salsk steppes to the Elbe, whose arms have smashed the armour of Germany.*

Onto the streets of Berlin came soldiers who had lived through a great deal. Some had already shed their blood: like Antaeus they had risen from their earth again and come to Berlin. With them marched the shadows of fallen heroes. Let's remember everything: the heat of that first summer, the screech of enemy tanks and the creaking of peasant carts. Let's remember the steppe in forty-two, gritted teeth and the bitter smell of wormwood; the oath we took in those days: to stand out! We have arrived in Berlin because Soviet people are strong; when fate tempted them to miserable salvation, they preferred to die rather than surrender. Now the world sees the shining face of victory, but let it remember how this victory was born of Russian blood on Russian soil.

The Red Army is marching along the streets of Berlin. It is now not far to the Brandenburg Gates and the "Triumphal Way". Let us try for a moment to rise above the events of the hour and ponder the meaning of what is happening. From the moment Berlin became the capital of a predatory empire, not one foreign soldier has walked down its streets. The Germans fought on foreign soil. They took tiny Denmark by the throat. They swallowed Austro-Hungary. Then they began the First World War, lost, and without paying for it, began to prepare for the Second. If in Nurnberg, Weimar and Dresden there are monuments which testify to the genuine greatness of the German spirit, Berlin is a monument to the arrogance of Prussian generals...

We are in Berlin: it is the end of the Prussian militarists, the end of their bandit attacks! If all freedom-loving peoples can now talk about international security at a long table in San Francisco, it is because the Russian infantryman, who went through hell somewhere on the Don or Velikiye Luki, has written in charcoal under the defeated Valkyries: "I am in Berlin. Sidorov."

We are in Berlin: it is the end of nazism! I recall how, many years ago, young thugs practiced shooting on the streets around Alexanderplatz: then they were shooting disobedient compatriots. Later they passed through Prague, through Paris, through Kiev. Now they are shooting their last bullets on the same streets. A British journalist writes: "When we were told about German atrocities, we thought it was an

* There were also those who travelled from the Pacific to Germany, from the outback of Australia to Germany, from North Africa and South Africa—to Germany, from Malaysia to Germany, and had been fighting for over six years.—*Tr.*

exaggeration. In Buchenwald, in Oradour we realised what the Nazis were capable of..." What can I add to that? Perhaps this: Buchenwald and Oradour are miniature models of Maidanek, Treblinka, Auschwitz. I know that grief cannot be measured in figures, yet I will nonetheless cite one—cameramen have filmed the storerooms in Auschwitz: six tons of women's hair cut from the heads of the victims. The world can see from what fate we have saved the women of every country, our distant sisters from Saxony, Scotland and Ohio.

What a ghastly chain! Peaceful Berlin was enjoying its innocuous amusements: the burgher on buying a pair of shoes, asked to use the radioscope to see if they were good fit. Then he went to a restaurant and, before eating his steak, enquired how many calories it contained, four hundred or five hundred. And in the building next door specialists were drawing up the designs for the furnaces in Maidanek, Auschwitz and Buchenwald. And here is the figure—six tons of women's hair... What would have happened to the children of the Canadian farmer or an Australian shepherd if comrade Sidorov had not arrived in Berlin.

We have never been racists. The leader of our state told the world: the wolf is beaten not because he is grey, but for eating sheep. As victors we do not speak of the breed of the wolf. However, we do speak of the sheep, and will continue to speak of the sheep: that is the story longer than life, that is the sorrow of each of us.

I want to stress once again that I never thought of revenge. In the worst days of the war, when the enemy was trampling our country, I knew that our soldiers would never disgrace oneself by lawless violence. "We are not dreaming of revenge. In this Soviet people will never resemble the Nazis, will not torture children or abuse the wounded. It is something else we seek; justice alone is capable of mitigating our pain. We want to destroy the Nazis—such is the demand of justice... If the German soldier lays down his arms and surrenders, we shall not touch him. He will live. Perhaps the future Germany will re-mould him, will turn this mindless murderer into a worker and a human being. Let German pedagogues ponder the problem. We are thinking of something else: about our country, our work, our families. We have learned to hate because we have learned to love.

When I wrote these lines the Germans were in Rzhev. I repeat them now, when we are in Berlin. Much has been said about the keys to this dreadful city. We entered it without any keys. Or perhaps there was a key, each soldier had the key in his heart: it was great love and great hatred.

There is an old saying that victors are magnanimous. If our people can be accused of anything, it is not lack of magnanimity. We do not open fire on the unarmed, we do not take revenge on the innocent. However, we remember everything, and our hatred of the executioners of Maidanek, of those who hanged and burned, will not grow cold. I would sooner cut off my own hand than write about forgiving the monsters who buried children alive, and I know that all the citizens of our country, all honest people around the world think and feel the same.

We are in Berlin: it is the end of the black-out of the century, the black-out of nations, of conscience, of reason, Berlin was the symbol of evil, the breeding ground of death and violence. It was from Berlin that the predators flew out to Guernica, Madrid, Barcelona. It was from here that the columns moved out which trampled across the gardens of France, mutilated the ancient gems of Greece, tormented Norway and Yugoslavia, Poland and Holland. By taking Berlin we have saved not only our own country; we have saved culture. If Britain gives birth to another Shakespeare, if France produces another Delacroix, if the dreams of the best minds of humanity about a golden future for mankind are ever realised, it is because Sidorov is walking down the streets of Berlin, past beer taverns and barracks, past torture chambers, past workshops where they wove hammocks out of the hair of their victims.

On listening to the boom of cannon which fills the streets of our capital every evening, we recall the silence of a difficult morning in June. Retreating from among the burning villages of Byelorussia and the region of Smolensk, we knew that we would reach Berlin. I could say a great deal about it, but perhaps no words are necessary here except one: Berlin, Berlin! That used to be the blackest word, and now it has become for us the finest word of all: there among the ruins and fires of the city from which came war, happiness is being born—happiness of my native land, of a child of the world.

NOTES

I. EHRENBURG. The Fate of Europe

[1] The Cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod, a monument of medieval Russian architecture built in 1045-1050.

[2] The lament of Yaroslavna... A reference to a passage in *The Lay of Igor's Host*, an old Russian chronicle, in which the wife of Prince Igor, Yaroslavna, grieves over the news that Igor has been taken captive by the Polovtsi (1185).

[3] Andrei Rublyov (c. 1360-1370—c. 1430)—a Russian icon painter.

[4] Alexander Nevsky (1220-1263)—Prince of Novgorod (1236-1251), Great Prince of Vladimir (from 1252). With his victories over the Swedes (the battle on the Neva, 1240) and over the Germans (the battle on lake Chudskoye, 1242) he secured the western frontiers of Rus.

[5] Dmitry Donskoy (1350-1389)—Great Prince of Moscow (1359) and of Vladimir (from 1362). Led the armed struggle of the Russian people against the Mongol-Tartar hordes and defeated them in the battle of Kulikovo Field (1380).

[6] Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848)—Russian literary critic, journalist, revolutionary democrat and materialist philosopher.

[7] Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889)—Russian revolutionary democrat, scholar, writer and literary critic.

[8] Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910)—Russian writer, author of the novels *War and Peace* (1863-1869), *Anna Karenina* (1873-1877), *Resurrection* (1889-1899) and others.

[9] Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881)—Russian writer, author of the novels *Insulted and Humiliated* (1861), *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868), *The Karamazov Brothers* (1879-1880) and others.

[10] Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)—Russian writer, author of numerous stories, tales, and the plays *The Seagull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *The Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904).

[11] Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)—Russian composers.

[12] The Decembrists—Russian aristocratic revolutionaries who led an insurrection against tsarist autocracy in December 1825.

[13] Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883)—Russian writer, author of the novels *Rudin* (1856). *A Nest of the Gentry* (1859), *On the Eve* (1860), *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and others.

G. ZHUKOV. Reminiscences and Reflections

[1] The Allies—the USA and Great Britain.

[2] During the war more than 6,000 partisan units comprising over a million partisan fighters operated behind enemy lines.

[3] Alexander Vasilevsky (1895-1977)—Marshal of the Soviet Union. As the representative of General Headquarters during the Berlin operation, he coordinated the operations of several Fronts (in the north of Byelorussia and in the Baltic).

[4] Alexei Antonov (1896-1962)—General of the Army, then deputy Chief of the General Staff.

[5] Vyacheslav Molotov (1890-1986)—political and state figure of the Soviet Union; from 1941 to 1957 he was the first deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (Council of Ministers) of the USSR, and also, from 1941-1945, deputy Chairman of the State Defence Committee.

[6] Nikolai Bulganin (1895-1975)—Soviet state figure. From 1941 Member of the Military Councils of a number of Fronts; from 1944—member of the State Defence Committee and deputy People's Commissar of Defence.

[7] Konstantin Rokossovsky (1896-1968)—Marshal of the Soviet Union, Marshal of Poland. During World War II he commanded the army which fought in the Battle of Moscow, and also the Bryansk, Don, Central, First and Second Byelorussian Fronts.
[8] Mikhail Kalinin (1875-1946) Soviet state and Party figure. From 1938 the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

O. GONCHAR. The Standard Bearers

[1] Romania, an ally of Nazi Germany during World War II, was the first country entered by Soviet troops as they liberated Europe.
[2] A name given to intelligence agents known for their daring and military skill.
[3] Ion Antonescu (1882-1946)—fascist military dictator in Romania from 1940 to 1944. He was sentenced to death by a people's tribunal.

V. RUDNY. They Made It!

[1] During the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878) Russia helped Bulgaria to free itself from Turkish rule.
[2] A reference to the novel *The Golden Calf* (1931) by Ilya Ilf (1897-1937) and Yevgenii Petrov (1903-1942).

V. KOZHEVNIKOV. The Mountain Peaks

[1] Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841)—Russian poet. A number of his works reflect his impressions of the time he spent in the Caucasus.
[2] Grigory Ordjonikidze (1886-1937)—Soviet state and Party figure, one of those who organised the creation of heavy industry in the USSR.
[3] Magnitka—popular name for the Magnitogorsk metallurgical combine built in 1929-1934.
[4] Yugene Onegin—hero of a novel in verse of the same name by Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837).

S. SMIRNOV. The Russians in Rome

[1] Song to lyrics by the Soviet poet Vasili Lebedev-Kumach (1898-1949), music by the Soviet composer Isaak Dunayevsky (1900-1955).
[2] Mikhail Kutuzov (1745-1813)—Russian military leader under whose command Russian troops defeated Napoleon in the Patriotic War of 1812.
[3] A reference to the White Guard army which fought in the south of Russia during the Civil War (1918-1920) under the command of General Wrangel.
[4] Valentin Serov (1865-1911), Victor Vasnetsov (1848-1926), Konstantin Korovin (1861-1939)—Russian artists.

V. BYKOV Alpine Ballad

[1] Song to lyrics by the Soviet poet Mikhail Isakovsky (1900-1973), music by composer Matvei Blanter (b. 1903).

B. PASTERNAK. Spring

[1] The Cathedral of St. Basil (built in 1555-1560) on Red Square, Moscow.

I. KONEV. Year of Victory

[1] Kurt Tippelskirch—a West German historian of World War II.

V. BOGOMOLOV. Zosia

[1] Sergei Yesenin (1895-1925)—Soviet poet, author of subtle lyrical verse.
[2] The verse quoted here and further on is taken from works by Sergei Yesenin.
[3] A reference to the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) and World War I (1914-1918).
[4] Lines from the drama in verse *Boris Godunov* (1825) by Alexander Pushkin.
[5] A lyrical song popular during the war years, verse by Agatov, music by the composer Nikita Bogoslovsky.

V. VISHNEVSKY. Street Fighting in Danzig

[1] Units armed with "Faust patrons"—racket launchers.
[2] People's volunteer corps.
[3] DShK—a large-calibre machine-gun.

V. SUBBOTIN. How Wars End

[1] The war between Finland and the USSR, 1939-1940.

B. GORBATOV. Surrender

[1] A reference to the Compiègne armistice, signed in the forest of Compiègne (France) in 1918 between defeated Germany and the anti-German coalition—the USA, Great Britain, France and others, and also the Versailles Peace Treaty, which concluded World War I. Subsequent events in Europe revealed the inadequacy of these agreements.

B. POLEVOI. These Four Years

[1] A reference to soldiers who fought on the side of Germany in a Russian military formation created by the traitor General Vlasov.
[2] Yevgeny Chirikov (1864-1932)—Russian writer who emigrated in 1920.
[3] The Slovak uprising—an armed anti-Nazi uprising in Slovakia in August-September 1944, led by Slovak and Czech Communists.

L. SLAVIN. A Trip to Zerbst

[1] Catherine the Great (1729-1796)—Russian empress from 1762. Born Sophia Augusta Frederica, a German princess, she came to the throne by overthrowing, with the support of the palace guard, Emperor Peter III (German prince Karl Pyotr Ulrich), tsar from 1761.
[2] Karl Baedeker. *Grossdeutschland für Bahn und Auto*, 3 Auf 1. Leipzig, 1943, with an introduction by Reichsminister Rosenberg: "...and small, fragrant Zerbst, in the middle of which rises up the palace of Catherine the Great as a citadel of Germanism, called upon to nourish the peoples of the world..."
[3] Alexander Suvorov (1729-1800)—Russian military leader.
[4] During the reign of Catherine the Great the Crimea was joined to Russia (1783) as a result of the Russo-Turkish wars.
[5] At the Grunewald Battle (1410) the German order of Teutonic Knights was defeated by the combined troops of Poland, Luthuania and Russia.
[6] At the Battle at Chudskoye Lake (1242) the Teutonic Knights were defeated by Russian troops under the command of Prince Alexander Nevsky.
[7] At the battle at Kunersdorf (1759), the Prussian army of Friedrich II was defeated by Russian and Austrian troops.

"THE GERMANS HAVE NOT JUST ENCROACHED UPON THE ANCIENT STONES OF EUROPE, THEY HAVE CRUSHED HER BODY, HER YOUTH, HER CHILDREN."

ILYA EHRENBURG

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